

ABSTRACT

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OF POETRY

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In my dissertation I give a philosophical account of poetry from an analytic perspective—one that is also informed by studies in linguistic communication (pragmatics) and cognitive psychology, and that takes into account the many varieties of poetic traditions around the world.

In chapter one I argue that philosophically rigorous study of poetry is long overdue, and that it should focus not on what poetry has in common with the other literary arts, but rather on what is distinct to it. In chapter two I give a cross-cultural history of poetry, showing the many types of features that are typical of the art form. From this history it emerges that beneath the variety of poetic traditions all over the globe lies a remarkably consistent set of features—the use of recurrence patterns.

In chapter three I argue for an intentional-historical formalist definition of poetry according to which a poem is either (1) a verbal art object relationally or intrinsically intended to belong in the poetic tradition, or (2) a verbal art object intrinsically intended to involve use of repetition schemes (naïve poetry-making). In

my fourth chapter I investigate the psychological reasons for poetry to have begun as and remained an art that relies on repetition devices, focusing on two non-literate groups: the illiterate *trovadores* of Northeastern Brazil, and pre-literate children. Both cases suggest an innate predisposition to attend to and produce linguistic recurrence structures of various, sometimes highly intricate, sorts.

In my fifth chapter I consider the Relevance theory claim in pragmatics that, as a rule, repetition incurs extra linguistic processing effort, and that this must be outweighed by an increase in contextual effects, given the assumption of relevance. I argue that although this picture of poetic understanding is largely correct, repetition can also be seen as a cognitive facilitator, helping us draw connections that might have gone unnoticed without it.

I conclude by exploring the contributions my approach to poetry may offer to other topics in aesthetics and philosophy art, such as aesthetic experience, aesthetic properties, and theories of interpretation.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS: A PHILOSOPHY OF POETRY

By

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Preface

I first had the idea for this project during the Art and Mind NEH Summer Institute organized by Jerrold Levinson at the University of Maryland. Already at an earlier graduate seminar Levinson taught, I had been struck by how philosophical discussions about literature invariably focused on narrative fiction, and how rarely, if ever, poetry was discussed. This trend remained true at the NEH Institute meetings, and as I heard some speakers discuss imaginative engagement with fictional characters and situations, I wondered how the theories they were working with—various versions of simulation and ‘theory’ theory—might apply to poetry, especially lyric poetry, which is not narrative and seldom has characters.

The more I researched on poetry, the less appealing that path seemed, and ultimately I gave up on the idea of adapting theories that seemed better suited for one kind of genre (as narrative fiction, broadly conceived, includes film and drama) to another kind of verbal art, as the differences between literary narrative fiction and poetry grew gradually more intractable.

But as my road changed, research became more difficult. Philosophers not only were not talking about poetry, they were not writing about it either, and they had not been for quite a while. I looked far and wide and found myself drawn to work in phonetics and phonology (notably, the work on metrics by Morris Halle, Paul Kiparsky, and others) and in pragmatics (the ‘relevance theory’ of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson). That, and what I was discovering about the various poetic traditions around the globe, made me want to tease out what I intuitively felt was unique to poetry, and to define it in terms of a pure formalism. My naiveté about that possibility

duly exposed, in the end I came right back home and found inspiration in the work of my advisor (with whom I had spent the better part of my graduate school years disagreeing!).

What follows is a project that retains the interdisciplinary spirit of that NEH Institute. This means that, while it is guided by and centered around the more strictly philosophical aim of defining an art form, it draws from disciplines outside of philosophy as a means both to check my proposal against empirical data and actual communicative and poetic practices and (thereby) also to bolster support for the definition by providing what I think is its empirical ‘why’.

I express my gratitude to Gregory Currie, for inspiring with his own interdisciplinary approach and supporting mine, to Georges Rey for pushing me to consider the broader and positively fundamental philosophical questions, and to Levinson for giving me the space to pursue what I wanted, and the philosophical criticism, academic counseling, and encouragement that I needed. I wish to thank the committee as a whole for their patience and support.

I dedicate my work to the memory of my grandmother Edília.

A.C.S.R.
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Chapter 1: Poetry in Contemporary Philosophy of Art

Poetry has enjoyed a stellar history since the beginnings of philosophy, and one arguably unmatched by any other art form. No lesser figures than Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche devoted serious thought to it, and Hume and Mill found it worth discussing in their works. Plato's exclusion of poetry from his ideal city was philosophy's greatest backhanded compliment to the power of the poetic art. Most, if not all, other philosophers looked favorably upon poetry, perhaps none so much as the German Idealists. Here, for instance, is Kant's view:

Among all the arts *poetry* holds the highest rank. (It owes its origin almost entirely to genius and is least open to guidance by precept or examples.) It expands the mind: for it sets the imagination free, and offers us, among the unlimited variety of possible forms that harmonize with a given concept, ... that form which links the exhibition of the concept with a wealth of thought to which no linguistic expression is completely adequate, and so poetry rises aesthetically to ideas. Poetry fortifies the mind: for it lets the mind feel its ability—free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination—to contemplate and judge phenomenal nature as having aspects that nature does not on its own offer in experience either to sense or to the understanding, and hence poetry lets the mind feel its ability on behalf of and, as it were, as a schema of the supersensible.¹

For similar reasons, Hegel also placed poetry at the top of his hierarchy of the arts; even for Schopenhauer, it stands second only to music: an art form which, as an immediate copy of the Will itself, belongs in a different category altogether, so that poetry remains at the top of what Schopenhauer would call the representational arts.

Given such a distinguished history, it is perhaps rather surprising to find that philosophers of art in the analytic tradition have not been very interested in poetry lately. Since the 1970s, there has been a steady decline in philosophical interest in poetry and a concomitant trend in the philosophy of literature to treat poetry as on a

¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 53, p. 327 [orig.] (W.S. Pluhar translation, Hackett 1987 [1790]).

par with novels and other forms of literary prose. The *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* is an excellent thermometer of the interest in poetry in the analytic philosophy tradition. Since its inception in 1942, the *JAAC* has published about 135 articles on some aspect of poetry or poetics. Of these, 82 were published in the 1950s and '60s, that is, about 60% of the total.² The 1970s still saw about 29 articles on poetry or on some poet's work (with William Blake the sure winner among philosophers), so together those three decades account for 82% of all articles on poetry the journal has published to date. In the 1980s the *JAAC* published only nine articles on poetry; in the '90s, three.

Frequently, also, work on topics that *prima facie* seem most intimately connected with poetry—as with the flurry of essays on metaphor in the 1970s and '80s, most of them published in the *Critical Inquiry*³—even if they draw on poems for their examples, do not treat these as topics pertaining to poetry in particular but to literature or even art in general—and, in the case of metaphor, as is appropriate, as a topic pertaining to language as a whole. The most explicit acknowledgement, if not endorsement, of this attitude—which I will call a 'generalist' attitude to literature—is perhaps to be found in the opening sentences of the entry on poetry in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*:

Not surprisingly, the philosophical issues that arise in connection with poetry as a form of art in almost all cases are not specific to it, but relevant to the understanding and evaluation of literature (and indeed other forms of art) more generally; an obvious example is that of the nature of metaphor. Thus it is far from clear that there is a 'philosophy of poetry' in anything like the

² The number is the result of keyword searches on 'poetry', 'poem', 'poetic', 'form', and 'prosody' (in full text) in the *JAAC* at www.jstor.org, as well as a review of the table of contents of all *JAAC* issues from 1942 to 1962.

³ Vol. 5, 1978.

sense in which there is a ‘philosophy of literature’ and a ‘philosophy of criticism’.⁴

Such a trend, of course, is not without its reasons. Here I offer four factors that might jointly explain the prolonged lack of interest in poetry and the ‘generalist’ trend in the philosophy of literature. The first concerns in particular the current dearth of philosophical articles on poetry, while the remaining ones are about the pervasive generalist attitude toward literature.

Perhaps the main reason poetry is not widely discussed in philosophy publications today is to be found in academic specialization and the proliferation of academic journals. It was far more common only a few decades ago for scholars in departments other than philosophy to publish in journals such as the *JAAC*. Indeed, a look at the articles on poetry from the first three decades of the *JAAC*’s publication shows that many of the *Journal*’s regular contributors of articles concerned with the literary arts used to usher from English and Comparative Literature departments. Perhaps it became professionally less appealing to non-philosophers to publish in journals such as the *JAAC* once journals in their home disciplines were of a sufficient number to accommodate the supply of articles being produced. Whatever the reasons, the fact that many of the *JAAC*’s articles on literature were being written by non-philosophers unfortunately only shows philosophers’ lack of interest in poetry to be even more pervasive and long-standing than it appears at first.

As for the generalist attitude that emphasizes the commonalities between poetry and other verbal art forms to the neglect of their differences, we would do well to look to the history of literature itself for its possible basis. Literature emerged as

⁴ Alex Neill (2003), p. 605.

poetry—as versified poetry, that is—and forms such as the novel are rather recent arrivals that owe their existence in no small part to the invention of the printing press.

Consider, for example, this ancient Sumerian poem, dating back to 2025 B.C:

Bridegroom, dear to my heart,
Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet,
Lion, dear to my heart,
Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet.⁵

In part because, for much of our history, what was said could not be easily recorded and had to be memorized, the use of various kinds of patterned repetition was essential to the preservation and dissemination of works. Thus the early oral poets created and relied on metrical schemes, formulaic phrases, and many other mnemonic devices. And so, if we look again at our first example, we will notice that only *one* word is changed in the second couplet of this stanza (we might surmise that the Sumerian poet in question must have had a particularly bad memory!). Now, when we move forward a few millennia to the seventeenth century, we begin to find passages such as the following:

In the greatest heat of this hurly-burly, it came into Don Quixote's head that he was certainly involved in the disorder and confusion of King Agramant's camp; and calling out with a voice that shook the whole house, 'Hold, valorous Knights,' said he, 'all hold your furious hands, sheath all your swords, let none presume to strike on pain of death, but hear me speak.' The loud and monstrous voice surprised everybody into obedience, and the Don proceeded: I told you before, gentlemen, that this castle was enchanted, and that some legion of devils did inhabit it: now let your own eyes confirm my words...⁶

We still find some repetition in the form of grammatical parallelism in this passage (there are several clauses in the imperative, for instance), but nothing like the highly patterned structure that we find in, say, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Illiad*. It would

⁵ 'To the Royal Bridegroom' (Johnson 1993, 715).

⁶ Cervantes, *The Life and Achievements of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Ozell's revision of Peter Motteux's translation. New York: Modern Library, 1930, p. 390.

be considerably more difficult for this storyteller to hold even this short paragraph in memory; it would be impossible to consign the thousand pages that make up Don Quixote's many adventures to it. Once the need to memorize is gone, the narrative is allowed to flow free of the constraints of conforming to a patterned structure (naturally, it must still conform to an overall narrative structure). In sum, the contemporary generalist attitude to literature, evinced most obviously in the widespread use of the terms 'poetry' and 'literature' interchangeably in philosophical works, may in part be explained by the fact that, for a good part of literary history, poetry and literature were indeed the same art form.

However, while this may in part explain the generalist attitude, it evidently does not justify it. Once we have other forms of literature, such as the novel, it makes little sense to use the term 'poetry' to refer to them. Although with the novel literature largely let go of the musical element, poetry has retained its 'musicality', arguably to this day.⁷ So while poetry may often recapitulate music, and prose literature often recapitulate poetry,⁸ these three art forms belong in a historical continuum that nevertheless has marked discontinuities. Knowledge—even specialized knowledge—about one of these art forms may well leave the specialist in the dark regarding the characteristics and conventions of the other two. In other words, knowledge about, or expertise in, one of these art forms does not entail knowledge about or expertise in the

⁷ Free verse, of course, is a challenge to this claim. I will discuss free verse in the chapters to follow.

⁸ It is interesting that, when such recapitulation occurs, we find that the art form is 'at its best', as evinced in these frequently made comments: 'the best prose literature is as good as poetry'; 'the best poetry is like music'. What, then, one wonders, is the best music as good as? I leave the answer to Schopenhauer and his followers.

others. Likewise, being a good or even talented practitioner of one of these art forms does not translate into being an able practitioner of either of the other two.

One trend in philosophy in general and another in aesthetics in particular may also contribute to an explanation for this trend. The general interest in language—particularly in issues of meaning and truth—that marked philosophy the last century manifested itself in philosophy of literature as an interest in figures of speech. Poetry, as is known, makes use both of sound *schemes*, such as rhyme, alliteration, and meter, and *tropes*, or figures of speech, such as metaphor, simile, and metonymy. Even if it is in literature, and especially in poetry, that the meanings of words are ‘stretched to their limit’, the use of metaphors and other figures of speech is part of our everyday use of language. Since these figures are not in the exclusive domain of poets but are the prerogative of all speakers of a language, they are not a differentiating characteristic among the literary arts. The focus on tropes, as opposed to schemes, can thus be seen as another contributing factor to the generalist approach to literature. The neglect of these formal aspects of poetry can thus be seen as another reason why philosophers have treated poetry as perhaps no more than the most striking in a continuum of verbal art forms rather than a literary kind deserving of separate study.

Finally, the issue that helped launch analytic aesthetics in the 1950s—the search for a general definition of art—is reflected in the same search for commonalities among the literary arts. Even while Morris Weitz (1956) despaired of finding an essential feature to explain all the arts, defending instead a family-resemblance approach, by doing so he spurred a search for this holy grail, and he is practically alone nowadays in holding that no common essence of art can be found,

even if it is widely agreed that he was right that such an essence would not be an *intrinsic* feature of artworks.⁹ So the generalist trend in philosophy of literature is in keeping also with traditional analytic aesthetics and philosophy of art.

Nearly half a century after Weitz's challenge, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the American Society for Aesthetics, Peter Kivy called upon philosophers of art to set aside those holistic goals and to engage in an exercise in *differences* (Kivy 1993). He argued then, and later in his *Philosophies of Arts* (1997), that many of the purported similarities among the arts—e.g. that they are all representational—have been presumed since the times of Plato and Aristotle partly because of an unchecked acceptance of their views and partly as a result of readings of the *Republic* and the *Poetics* that paid insufficient attention to the artistic environment to which they were responding. What today we call the literary arts were back then performing, and perforce mimetic, arts. While literature today is primarily *read* literature, literature in ancient times was predominantly spoken and heard. (One may not wish to call what a rhapsode reciting a lyric or a narrative does 'representational' in the same sense that actors on stage represent actions, but then we will have to find a similar term to signify the interpretive reciting that is now absent when we read the words directly from the page, an activity that does not involve such performance.) Kivy noted how philosophical thinking about some specific art forms—most notable, music and film—had flourished in recent decades, partly because philosophers began to focus on what was peculiar to those forms rather than continue to search for what they shared with other ones.

⁹ Recent attempts to revive Weitz's family resemblance view include Gaut (2000, 2005).

I think Kivy's call for philosophical attention to differences among the arts was a salutary move. Having said that, I also think that with respect to literature Kivy did not go far enough in the direction he encouraged us to take. While he persuasively argued that presumed analogies between novels and the visual arts do not stand scrutiny, and that these arts cannot both fall under the umbrella of 'representational' or 'mimetic' art, he nevertheless uses 'poetry' and 'literature' interchangeably, and largely ignored the differences within the literary arts that his own arguments would lead us to expect. Still, it seems clear that Kivy would only countenance a move toward finer distinctions within the literary arts as well. My purpose here is to heed his call and outline these distinctions, particularly with regard to how poetry can be defined, and how our experiences of poems differ substantially from our experiences of other literary forms such as the novel or short story.

I begin my project by providing a survey of historical traditions around the globe. It is crucial, I think, to take into account the characteristics of all poetic practices, if a definition of poetry is to have any value. From this survey it emerges that, beneath the incredible variety of poetic traditions, ancient and contemporary, there lies a remarkably consistent set of features—the use of certain kinds of recurrence patterns. While there is variation as to which patterns predominate in a given poetic culture (variations dependent in part upon the prosodic nature of the language in which the poetry is written), more or less the same patterns emerge everywhere.

In chapter three I argue for an intentional-historical formalist definition of poetry. In my view, a poem is either (1) a verbal art object relationally or intrinsically

intended to belong in the poetic tradition, or (2) a verbal art object intrinsically intended to involve use of repetition schemes (naïve poetry-making). The apparent circularity of the first disjunct in the definition is avoided by appeal to intentions to produce objects that belong to a tradition of texts and performances that in fact exhibit certain features, whether or not the poet thinks of them in this way. Inasmuch as the history of poetry has shown the concern with repetition schemes to be its one consistent feature, the intention to create a verbal art object eligible for membership in the poetic tradition is therefore the intention to create a verbal art object with concern for those repetition devices: following, transforming, or rejecting previously established patterns.

Since my definition of poetry is backward-looking, the question arises as to what informed the intentions of the first poets. Naturally, they could not have intended their works to be like previous poems, since there weren't any. In my fourth chapter, 'Repetition and Poetic Effects', I investigate the psychological reasons for poetry to have begun as and remained an art that relies on repetition devices. I focus on a contemporary oral culture, that of the illiterate *trovadores* of Northeastern Brazil, and pre-literate children. Both cases suggest a natural human predisposition to attend to and produce linguistic recurrence structures of various, sometimes highly intricate, sorts. I suggest that this innate predisposition was likely selected for in virtue of its contribution to language learning, and that it was exploited because of its mnemonic usefulness and aesthetic effects for ritualistic and artistic purposes.

Moving from creators to appreciators, in that chapter I also consider the relevance theory claim that, as a rule, repetition incurs extra linguistic processing

effort, and that this must be outweighed by an increase in contextual effects, given the assumption of relevance. The relevance theory assumption is that linguistic communication works on a ‘maximum cognitive effects for the minimum cognitive effort’ model. I argue that although this picture of poetic understanding is largely correct, repetition can also be seen as a cognitive facilitator, helping us draw connections that might have gone unnoticed without it. In other words, sometimes repetition structures demand greater cognitive effort (a demand that typically results in greater cognitive effects), but sometimes such structures also aid cognition, promoting more cognitive effects for less effort than, for instance, a paraphrase without repetition might demand. I argue, in addition, that the claim made by relevance theorists that affective responses are reducible to cognitive effects is too strong.

Finally, I conclude by exploring some further avenues of inquiry opened up by this project, sketching some issues in particular that could benefit from a closer look at poetry as a distinct art form. Such study could, for instance, (1) contribute to the intentionalism debate in interpretation; (2) contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between lower-level perceptual properties and aesthetic properties; and (3) contribute to an understanding of how that relationship affects how we evaluate poems.

Chapter 2: A Survey of Poetry

It is a remarkable fact in the history of humankind that in all ancient cultures—the Egyptian, the Middle-Eastern, the Greek, the Indian, the Chinese—literature first emerged as poetry, and poetry as song. Religion played a fundamental role in the origins of our literary production, as most of it was initially tied to religious rituals.¹⁰ Our earliest records date back to 2600 B.C., in the Pyramid Texts of Egypt, where we can find, among hymns to the entire array of ancient Egyptian gods, verses that reveal a belief in a creator god not unlike the god of later monotheistic religions:

The generations come and go among mankind,
and god, who knows all natures,
still lies hidden.

...
They are His living images, come from
His very self.¹¹

A common practice in Antiquity was the writing of ‘wisdom poetry’, a means of passing life instructions to the next generation, particularly in royal families, as in the Pharaoh Ptahhotep’s ‘First Maxim’, from ca. 2330 B.C.: ‘Never be arrogant because of your knowledge;/approach the unlettered as well as the wise’.¹² **Epithalamia**, **panegyrics**, **odes**, all appear in our earliest records; typically, performances of poems were accompanied by the lyre, the flute, the harp, cymbals or (beginning around the 15th century) the sackbut.

Why should it have been this way? Why should literature have emerged as music and versified language? Indeed, why should music have emerged as versified language? Already in antiquity Aristotle conjectured that the origin of poetry lay in

¹⁰ This is true of ancient as well as more recent poetic traditions such as those of the Eskimo, the American Indians, and the Polynesians. See Johnson (1993), 715.

¹¹ J.L. Foster, (1993), 319.

¹² Id., p. 318.

our natural sense of harmony and rhythm, our inclination to imitate, and our pleasure in seeing or hearing others imitate actions or events.¹³ This of course presupposes a view of all poetry as *mimesis*, or imitation, a view which does not sit well with the personal character of the lyric, true as it may be of dramatic and even narrative poetry. But Aristotle's conjecture need not for that reason be discarded; indeed, contemporary philosophical psychologists argue that our well-documented early inclination for pretend play is the basis of human creativity.¹⁴ Nevertheless, while it seems uncontroversial that we are by nature endowed with a disposition for *mimesis*, there must be more to this picture if we are to explain the birth of literature as *verse*. For just as we could have had music without words, we could have had words without music—that is, words without the added elements of **versification**¹⁵ as well as words that were neither chanted nor sung.¹⁶ I think Aristotle's picture can be filled in if we

¹³ *Poetics* 1148b.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Carruthers 2002: 'From the age of about eighteen months all normal children, in all human cultures, start to do something which (when viewed from an external perspective at least) appears very odd indeed—they begin to pretend. ... It is hard to believe that these two species-specific properties—adult creativity and childhood pretend play—are not intimately connected with one another' (228).

¹⁵ All poetic terms will be highlighted when first used in the text, to indicate that a formal definition is given in Appendix I: Glossary of Poetic Terms.

¹⁶ To be fair, Aristotle mentions a kind of poetry, for which there was no name at the time, which was recited, not sung, and without instrumental accompaniment. But unfortunately he gives us no examples and independent evidence of this kind of poetry in ancient Greece is scanty. Terry Brogan (1993c), e.g., claims that 'strictly *recited* verse such as monody certainly existed, and the dialogue portions of drama were metrical' (787, italics mine), but in 1993d he defines monody as a 'solo song... originally an ode *sung* by a single voice [in contrast to the choral ode]' (798, italics mine). Aristotle's claim is in the *Poetics*, where he mentions a "nameless art that uses language, prose or verse, without harmony, as its means" (1448a): "There is further an art which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, and if in verse, either in some one or in a plurality of metres. This form of imitation is to this day without a name. We have no name for a mime of Sophron or Xenarchus [who wrote brief prose dialogues on rural and city life] and a Socratic conversation [Plato's dialogues]; and we should still be without one even if the imitation in the two instances were in **trimeters** or **elegiacs** or some other kind of verse" (1447b).

remind ourselves that the vastly rich recorded literature that we have emerged from oral traditions.

It is easy to agree with arguments to the effect that oral traditions require formulaic texts to aid memorization and thereby facilitate the transmission of hymns, narratives, or lyrics, and much work has been done on oral traditional poetry since the pioneering work of Milman Parry on Serbo-Croatian songs.¹⁷ Parry, together with Albert B. Lord, proposed that the transmission of literary and folkloric material occurs via a series of structural units, namely a *formula*, a *theme*, and a *story-pattern*. According to Parry, the formulaic phrase is ‘a word or group of words regularly used under given metrical conditions to express a given essential idea’, while the theme and story-pattern are formulas at the levels of typical scene and tale-type respectively:

The most often used phrases, lines, or even couplets—those which a singer uses most frequently when he is learning—establish the patterns for the poetry, its characteristic syntactic, rhythmic, metric, and acoustic molds and configurations. In time the individual practitioner of the art can form new phrases—create formulas—by analogy with the old as needed. When he has become proficient in thinking in the traditional patterns, including the traditional phrases and everything else like them, he is a full-fledged singer of oral traditional poetry. In essence, he has learned to speak—or to sing—the special language of that poetry. He composes naturally in the forms of his tradition, unconsciously, and often very rapidly, as a native speaker speaks a language.¹⁸

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* abound in such formulaic phrases, as do the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*. While each Homeric epic, for example, will have formulae peculiar to the kind of story being

¹⁷ Parry did not live to see his work in print, but it was completed and edited by Albert B. Lord in *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, and Lord was subsequently joined by Bela Bartók in the editing of *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (1951). Parry’s oral-formulaic theory has been enormously influential in anthropology, sociology, socio-linguistics, and poetics. See J.M. Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition* (1988) for an account of Parry’s work and influence.

¹⁸ Lord 1993, 863.

told—war phrases in the *Iliad*, journey phrases in the *Odyssey*—in both epics Achilles is ‘swift-footed’, Odysseus is ‘wily’, Agamemnon is the ‘Son of Atreus, most lordly and king of men’, and (as Richard Lattimore notes) ‘children are innocent, women are deep-girdled, iron is gray, ships are hollow, words are winged and go through the barrier of the teeth, the sea is wine-blue, barren, and salt, and bronze is sharp and pitiless. The list is almost endless’.¹⁹

Textual variations from poet to poet and performance to performance occur in accordance with the type of poetry that is being transmitted. Oral traditional poetry may be ritual, narrative, or lyric. Ritual songs (incantations, wedding and festivals songs, laments, eulogies, and lullabies) as well as lyric songs (predominantly love songs), tend to be shorter and therefore are easier to memorize word by word, although this is not always the case: many lyric songs, for instance, were occasional, so that memorization was not needed. Narratives (epics and ballads) on the other hand, which tend to be long, show more fluidity of text. Still, they remain fundamentally formulaic, as we have seen with the Greek epics, and in some cases, entire passages seem to have been passed on verbatim, to tell by the different records of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.²⁰

The structured, repetitive, and formulaic nature of oral traditional poetry clearly served a mnemonic purpose. But it seems to have served other, intrinsically related purposes as well, ones directly related to the affective effects that repetition can promote. In the case of incantations, for example, the rhythmic and repetitive

¹⁹ Introduction to his translation of the *Odyssey* (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 21.

²⁰ In the introduction to his translation of the epic, N.K. Sandars points out that ‘What we have in both the Sumerian and Semitic versions is the word for word repetition of fairly long passages of narrative and conversation, and of elaborate greeting formulae’ (Penguin Classics, 1985 revised reprint of 1972 edition, p. 48).

structures of the songs also served the function of giving the event a ritualistic quality and inducing religious affect.²¹ The fact that ritual songs make far more frequent use of the recurrence of specific words and phrases than do narrative and lyric poetry may be taken as evidence that the ability to foster religious excitement is directly related to repetition schemes. Meditation and prayer also rely on the power of repetition to promote religious affect and help bring about mystical experiences, as in this Afro-Brazilian ‘spiritual cleansing’ quatrain:

Descarrega, descarrega
todo o mal que aqui está;
leva, leva, leva
tudo pro fundo do mar.²²

Textual formulae are only part of the formalized structure that made poetry easy to remember, pleasing to the ear and moving to the heart and mind. A host of phonetic devices appear early on in poetic art and persist to this day. Indeed, as Kiparsky (1981) has pointed out, ‘of all art forms, literature, and especially poetry, has the greatest continuity of form in the Western tradition’.²³ At the metrical level, for example, the phrase *peri chroī* (meaning ‘around the body’ or ‘next to the skin’), appears in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* invariably at the same place in the verse

²¹ Lord 1993, 863f., and Foley 1993, 867.

²² ‘Unload, unload/all the evil that’s here/take, take, take/all to the bottom of the ocean’.

²³ Kiparsky 1981, 9. Kiparsky notes how painting was altered by the discovery of perspective in the Renaissance and how music changed with the development of chordal harmony: ‘It is impossible, however, to point to any such spectacular enrichments of technique in poetry. Styles and conventions have shifted, but not truly new forms have emerged. Both of the fundamental stylistic elements of poetry—figurative expression, using, for example, metaphor and metonymy, and schemes of formal organization such as those of parallelism, meter, rhyme and alliteration—have existed from the beginning’ (id.).

line, so as to form the **quantitative** metrical pattern *peri chroï* / ◡ ◡ //,²⁴ just as centuries later Dante repeatedly ends his lines with a paroxytonic word²⁵ so as to keep the **hendecasyllable** line and meter he made the staple of Italian poetry. **Alliteration**, the repetition of initial consonant sounds, has been more ubiquitous even than rhyme, and is a regular feature of nearly every major poetry in the world.²⁶ It appears in

Aeschylus

ἁμαρτίας σφε δεῖ θεοῖς δοῦναι δίκην,
ὥς ἂν διδάχθῃ τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα²⁷

Virgil

*cuncta mihi Alpheum linquens locusque Molorchi
cursibus et crudo decernet Graecia caestu*

the Beowulf epic

Oft Scyld Scefing sceathena threatum

Dante

*Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando
Che la mia comedia cantar non cura*

Goethe

Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!

Rimbaud

La nuit, l'amie oh! La lune de miel

Fernando Pessoa

*Quero considerar-me e ver aquilo
Que sou, e o que sou o que é que tem*

Octavio Paz

La poesía ha puesto fuego a todos los poemas

²⁴ Id., p. 22. The symbols ‘/’ and ‘◡’ indicate, respectively, a marked (long or accented) syllable and an unmarked (short or unaccented) syllable. See ‘Marker’, and ‘Ictus’ in Appendix I: Glossary of Poetic Terms.

²⁵ A paroxytone is a word with penultimate stress, i.e. a word in which the main stress is on the next to last syllable. Oxytones have the main stress on the last syllable, and proparoxytones on the second to last syllable (i.e. third syllable from the end).

²⁶ Israeli, Persian and Arabic poetry appear to be an exception. See Percy G. Adams (1993), pp. 36-38.

²⁷ Transliterated, ‘hamartias sphe dei theois dounai diken,/ hōs an didachthē tēn Dios tyrannida’; translated, ‘For which the gods have called him to account/that he may learn to bear Zeus’ tyranny’ (*Prometheus Bound*, lines 9-10).

and Louise Glück

Machine of the family: dark fur, forests of the mother's body

Consonance, assonance, rhyme, and metrical patterns of numerous kinds are further phonetic techniques that are exemplified in the passages above. These techniques are not confined to Western traditions, but are evinced around the world in every culture with a poetic tradition, as the examples I provide in the next chapter will show. Whether or not they still serve the specific mnemonic function they did originally, such repetition patterns seem clearly to work in addition to create a rhythm, as in metrical verse, and to upset that rhythm to call attention to some words or create an onomatopoeic effect, as in metrical substitutions; they may create or reinforce parallelisms, as in 'machine' and 'mother' in the passage by Glück; they may draw connections between terms, as in *diken* (justice), *Dios* (God) and *didachthē* (learn) in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*; and in various ways they reinforce the meaning of what is conveyed or contribute to a psychological goal, as in ritual song, prayer, meditation, or lullabies.

The needs of early oral cultures and of our psychology thus gave rise to a literary tradition that relied heavily on phonetic and semantic structures such as **meter**, **rhyme**, **form**, formulaic phrases, and the many other poetic resources developed along their histories. That this tradition preserved its structural patterns despite the advent of writing is not surprising, especially given that the tradition of oral performance lived on despite the new possibility of creating records of what was performed. Poetry remained, for most of its history, primarily a performance and a musical art: an art to be heard, even when it could also be read.

The lyric in particular was from its beginnings a musical poem. Although drama and epic narrative poetry were also accompanied by music, ‘music in dramatic and epic poetry was at best secondary to other elements, being mainly a mimetic or mnemonic device’—the lyric, by contrast, had a more intimate connection with music insofar as it was entirely sung, chanted or melodiously recited, and insofar as singing, chanting or reciting was not incidental to what was said but a focus of aesthetic attention. The kinds of meters used in the three main kinds of poetry—epic, narrative and lyric—in Classical Greece are further evidence of the lyric’s closer and enduring kinship with music. Dramatic poetry used iambic meter (generally trimeter) for dialogues, for that was considered to be the meter closest to spoken language. Epic poetry was entirely in **dactylic hexameter**, thought to embody an exalted manner of speaking (this was also used in the choral odes of dramas), and the unshakable eminence of Homer ensured that this was the meter to be used in epic poetry for millennia.²⁸ Lyric poetry, which in Greece divided into *melic* (to be sung with musical accompaniment), iambic and elegiac (to be chanted), employed an enormous variety of meters, suited to a vast range of subjects, making full use of the rhythmic variations the language made possible:

Although lyric poetry is not music, it is representative of music in its sounds patterns, basing its meter and rhyme on the regular linear measure of the song; or more remotely, it employs **cadence** and **consonance** to approximate the tonal variation of a chant or intonation. Thus the lyric retains structural or substantive evidence of its melodic origins, and this factor serves as the categorical principle of poetic lyricism.²⁹

²⁸ Modern vernacular ‘equivalents’ were eventually produced in Italian (*endecassilabo*), French (alexandrines) and English (iambic pentameter) (Brogan 1993?, 769).

²⁹ Johnson 1993, 715.

This close kinship notwithstanding, twice in the history of Western lyric poetry its verbal and musical aspects became dissociated. The first time occurred in Greece around the 5th century B.C., when compositions for professional solo performers became the rule. The second time did not occur until the 14th century, the end of a period in which the lyric flourished in both the secular songs of the minstrels in all their guises—troubadours, trouvères, jongleurs, minnesingers—and in the liturgical chants of the Christian church. At this time musical forms that subordinate the words to the music (rather than the other way around), such as the madrigal, glee, catch, and round begin to establish themselves. We find what are perhaps the last explicit links between poetry and music in the very titles of some Renaissance works: Petrarch's sonnet sequence—*Canzoniere*—and Garcia de Rezende's anthology of fourteenth-century Portuguese poetry, *Cancioneiro Geral*, or *General Songbook*. We have by now come to a stage in this separation where theorists support and praise the severance, as in Wellek (1962, p. 150): 'we would say today that music sounds best without words, and that poetry speaks best without music. Both of them do best alone'. And yet a certain nostalgia for the time when poetry was song persists in the titles of much later works, as in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, Fernando Pessoa's *Cancioneiro*, Anna Akhmatova's 'Song of the Last Meeting', and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, to cite only a few. Indeed, some poets look reproachfully upon poetry that disregards the more musical elements of the craft:

When I asked [Derek] Walcott about the use of free verse in poetry, he was disdainful. "What's free about it?" he said. "As if the self is enough to make a poem. What makes a poem is the discipline inherent in making a poem. Trying to fit feelings in the requisite number of syllables and lines, disciplining one's feelings... The concept of song has gone out of

contemporary poetry for the time being, and has been out of contemporary poetry for a long while. And all those attributes, like rhyme, complexity, or rigidity of meter, have gone. If music goes out of language, then you are in bad trouble.”³⁰

Poetic tastes varying as they may, the fact remains that poetry emerged and blossomed in nearly all cultures. And it emerged as a highly crafted art: an art with well-defined techniques which characterize it to this day, in spite—perhaps because—of its dissociation from the art of music with which it was born.

In light of this history, in the next chapter I will offer a definition of poetry that takes linguistic recurrence patterns to be central to the poetic art. I will first consider some alternative approaches, and give reasons why I think they are not satisfactory. I will then defend a view that combines this history, the formalism it evidences, and the intentions of the poet as the only satisfactory account for what counts as poetry today.

³⁰ Hilton Als, “The Islander: Derek Walcott is writing a poetry of the Caribbean.” *The New Yorker*, 9 February 2004, p.45.

Chapter 3: A Definition of Poetry

i. Preliminary Remarks Concerning Concepts and Definitions

In the cross-cultural historical overview of poetic traditions of the previous chapter, some features emerged that were seen to be prominent around the globe. These commonalities will serve as the basis of the definition of poetry I will offer in this chapter. But what is it to give a definition? Is it to give an account of what people have in mind—the concept they are employing—when they use a given term (say, ‘poetry’)? Or is it perhaps to give an account of something ‘out there’, i.e., that exists and gets its properties extra-mentally? And how should we characterize this ‘something out there’: as abstract universals, as sets, as the existing practices? Either way, are definitions possible? My project here is to define poetry, and poems are ‘things’ that people make, in thought, orally, in writing. That being so, will it be the same to define ‘poetry’ as to define ‘car’, ‘tiger’, ‘square’, ‘justice’, ‘money’, or ‘unicorn’?

Without delving into what are profound and difficult questions about the nature of concepts and definitions, I will here sketch a very brief and rough picture of how I view the definitional part of my project.

The definition of poetry that follows is presented as the best explanation of poetic practices. In other words, my definition will be an attempt to provide the best account of the history of poetic practices, as well as the criteria that must be fulfilled for something to count as poem, in view of that account. My definition will thus have both a descriptive and a normative aspect. It best describes, or so I will argue, a tradition that exists in its own right, that is, the set of performances and verbal objects

that make it up. This description assumes a normative character inasmuch as, once the tradition is established, an author who wishes to insert her work in it must fulfill certain conditions: her work must be intentionally linked to that tradition, in ways that will become clear in the following sections.

So, in view of the alternatives above, I am not describing the concept ‘poetry’ that people might have in their minds. I think that aiming for such a psychological concept of poetry would be problematic for at least three reasons. First, the concept of poetry that may be in people’s minds could be wrong—besides, which people should we focus on? Secondly, an inquiry of that sort would take us far afield and into inquiries about how the people who do have the concept acquired it in the first place—via sufficient exposure to prototypical instances? By learning a definition?—such questions, while fundamental, are fundamental to inquiries about any concept, not only the concept of poetry. This in turn leads me to my third reason not to pursue that line (and one that will emerge again in what follows). The way people learn about how things in the world are, and the way that things in the world are, are two independent questions. It could be that we learn about things in the world, or at least about some things in the world, by generalizing upon adequate exposure to prototypical instances. That, however, does not mean that we could not, with sufficient investigation, move beyond the prototypes and ascertain the necessary and sufficient conditions for any one thing to be what it is. And things will remain what they are even if we fail to achieve that goal. In sum, questions of epistemology are one thing, questions of metaphysics another.

A brief note on artifacts. There is a sense (one which I wish to explore in future work), in which poems are like artifacts such as chairs and cars, in that both involve human intentions to create something of that kind. It has recently been argued (Thomasson, forthcoming) that, as a consequence of that intentional connection, ‘the metaphysical natures of artifactual kinds are *constituted by* the concepts and intentions of makers’ and that this in turn ‘endows them with some protection from certain kinds of ignorance and error about that nature’ (p. 2, her emphases). Thomasson thus lays a heavy burden on the intentions of makers, and one I think is excessive, in that the intentions of any maker will do, with the consequence that a chair could not be made by accident, and that anyone who intended to produce a chair would end up with one, even if he were mistaken about what chairs are. Although the intentions of makers are crucial to the making of chairs and poems, I think rather that, once an artifactual kind is created and established, the conceptual-metaphysical connection defended by Thomasson becomes rather weaker than she makes it out to be. This is because now there are criteria—functional ones in the case of chairs, historical ones in the case of poems—which must inform the intentions of makers. At best, that conceptual-metaphysical guarantee will obtain when a given artifactual kind is *first* created. But even so, insofar as some kinds end up being what they are after much trial and error, it could be that such a connection obtains only quite minimally. Here, incidentally, a distinction emerges between the initial creation of a kind such as ‘chair’ and the creations of the first poems. Whereas we may presume that the creation of the first chair involved intentions to create an object with a specific function, the creations of the first poems were rather the result of natural tendencies

to pattern language in certain ways. So poems may be artifacts, but artifacts of a special sort.

I will now turn to them.

ii. The Task of Defining Poetry

In light of the enormous variety of poetic traditions we find around the world and across the ages, it would seem that any attempt at finding a defining feature of poetry that would encompass all and only poems would be in vain. What can *Stabat Mater*, Beat poetry, Shakespeare's sonnets, Goethe's *Faust* and Japanese haiku possibly have in common? Attempts to provide positive accounts, with necessary or sufficient reasons for what counts as a poem, often meet with the counterexamples that human creativity is wont to produce. Consider the following excerpts from two twentieth-century poems. Are there any commonalities between the Georgian poet Galaktion Tabidze's 'Without Love' and the Mexican Octavio Paz's 'The Poet'?

უსიყვარულოდ
მზე არ სუფევს ცის კამარაზე,
სიო არ დაჰყრის, ტყე არ კრთება
სასიხარულოდ...

usiKvarulod
mze ar sufevs ts-is kamaraze,
sio ar dahqris, T-Ke ar krteba
sasixarulod...³¹

El hombre es el alimento del hombre. El saber no es distinto del soñar, el soñar del hacer. La poesía ha puesto fuego a todos los poemas. Se acabaron las palabras, se acabaron las imágenes. Abolida la distancia entre el nombre y la cosa, nombrar es crear, e imaginar, hacer.

³¹ 'Without love/the sun does not shine in the heavenly spheres/neither does the forest move, nor does the wind blow/with joy...' (Freire 2004; transliteration by Robert Tchaidze, my translation from Freire's own into Portuguese). 'Man is the food of man. Knowledge is no different from dreaming, dreaming from doing. Poetry has set fire to all poems. Words are finished, images are finished. The distance between the name and the thing is abolished; to name is to create, and to imagine, to be born' (Paz 1976; translated by Eliot Weinberger).

Aside from being literary texts, at first glance the similarities are hard to find. Even line breaks, a feature we typically associate with poetry, are absent in Paz's prose poem. Neither is there a rhyme scheme in it as we find in the Georgian example (*abca*), which also combines the rhymes with specific line lengths. The passage from Paz's poem is filled with metaphors ('Man is the food of man', 'to name is to create'), whereas Tabidze's has no metaphors (though there is imagery in it: 'the sun does not shine in the heavenly spheres'). In view of such dissimilarities, even those who are most familiar with the art form have shied away from drawing any boundaries between poetry and other types of verbal art. Thus Robert Pinsky, a former laureate poet, says he "will be content ... to accept a social, cultural definition of poetry: poetry is what a bookstore puts in the section of that name" (1998, p.126). It barely needs remarking that such a definition is inappropriate on many levels; I will note only that it would likely land us back precisely at the doors of people like Pinsky himself, that is, poets, inasmuch as bookstores follow rather than create the categories under which they sort their books. But even if that were an appropriate definition, we can imagine how misled and confused an unenlightened customer would be who headed for the poetry section of a Barnes & Noble and picked up a copy of, say, Bryan McGee's *The Elegant Universe*, left there by a negligent patron. Pinsky's 'definition' in fact flies in the face of the very project of his book, which is to familiarize the common reader with what he takes to be *essential* (or at least central) aspects of poetry, namely its formal aspects.

Frequently also when the attempt at a definition is made, the *definiens* quickly turns into a sort of example of what is being defined—in other words, how quickly

definitions of poetry turn rather poetic. It is difficult to agree with Shelley when in his *Defence of Poetry* he writes that “a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth,” and that is not only because we might be shy of eternal truths, or disinclined to accept any particular art form as holding exclusive rights to providing ‘the very image of life’ (Abrams 1987, p. 1809). A definition of this sort would give us little guidance when it came to sorting poetry from non-poetry—imagine the bookstore clerk trying to organize his shelves according to it.

It is perhaps peculiar that both attitudes—the belief that poetry cannot be defined and the attempt to define it sliding into poetic metaphor—can be exemplified by the same author. Laurence Perrine first states that ‘there is no sharp distinction between poetry and other forms of imaginative literature... The difference between poetry and other literature is only one of degree’ (Arp 1997, p.9), only to follow his claim, in the same paragraph, with what looks like a definition:

Poetry is the most condensed and concentrated forms of literature. It is language whose individual lines, either because of their own brilliance or because they focus so powerfully on what has gone before, have a higher voltage than most language. It is language that grows frequently incandescent, giving off both light and heat.

Naturally, one cannot but take all of this metaphorically; but unfortunately the metaphors are of little help in this case. For one, even if we accept that the language of some poems is metaphorically ‘incandescent’ and in some sense emanate light and heat, that is hardly true of all poems, many of which make use of language that is entirely mundane, as in William Carlos Williams’ renowned ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Perrine rightly notes that poetry ‘takes all life as its province’ and ‘is concerned with all kinds of experience—beautiful or ugly, strange or common, noble or ignoble, actual or imaginary’ (id., 8*f.*). Clearly, the language poets use to depict such experiences may likewise be varied, and need to match what is depicted in kind (i.e. the ignoble may be depicted in beautiful language). Perrine’s idea is that the language of poems somehow differs from ordinary discourse; poetry for him involves ‘a kind of language that says *more* and says it *more intensely* than does ordinary language’ (id., p.3). It is multi-dimensional, whereas ordinary language is one-dimensional. Ordinary language’s dimension is the understanding, and poetry adds sensuous, emotional, and imaginative dimensions to this—something it achieves by ‘its greater pressure per word and its greater tension per poem’ (id., 9*f.*). But again, this is not the case of all poems; moreover, the distinction flounders once we see that this is clearly an inaccurate (and outdated) view of ordinary language. Ordinary language has all the dimensions that poetry has, if not more. It conveys, daily and easily around the world, thoughts of all sorts in language that may be sensuous, emotional, and imaginative. While it may not take recourse to metrical patterns or rhyme schemes, it is often filled with imagery, simile and metaphor. The understanding or intellect is by no means its only dimension, and ordinary language is far from being merely ‘the kind that we use to communicate information’ (ibid.).

These continuities between everyday language and the language of poetry could indeed argue for Perrine’s view that poetry cannot be defined or sharply distinguished from other forms of verbal art, and he is not alone in defending such a position. A recent defense of this view is given by Robert Pierce, who has revisited

Morris Weitz's approach to the definition of art in general (Weitz 1956) and claimed that 'poetry' is no more than a 'family-resemblance' concept à la Wittgenstein (Pierce 2003). Surprising as this philosophical line may seem today, given the myriad responses to Weitz's view since his seminal article,³² it is not (as was the case with Weitz's) without its reasons or merits. Essentialism about art in general or any of the art forms in particular on the basis of features intrinsic to artworks may well be indefensible. Nevertheless, there may still be room for a definition justified by *relational* features, such as connection to a specifiable 'art world', the history of art, or the intentions of the artist, to cite a few of the well-known theories spawned by Weitz's challenge.³³ In any case, we should be careful not to conflate the issue of whether art in general may be defined with the issue of whether particular art forms may. We may be unable to distinguish poems from novels and yet be perfectly capable of separating them from a news article or an academic essay. Conversely, we may find it difficult, if not impossible, to specify what separates art in all its manifestations from non-art and yet find a way to distinguish poetry from literary prose. Naturally, there exists some relationship between defining art in general and defining particular art forms. If we are unable to define *any* of the particular art forms, that might count as strong indication that 'art-hood' is unlikely to be definable; on the other hand, the difficulties inherent in defining art may easily spill over into

³² A representative sample of these includes: Maurice Mandelbaum 1965, Arthur Danto 1964, George Dickie 1974, and Jerrold Levinson 1979.

³³ Corresponding more or less respectively to Danto, Dickie, and Levinson in footnote above. The family-resemblance conception of art has its most recent revival in Berys Gaut's 'cluster' account of art (Gaut 2000, 2005); critics of the view include Thomas Adajian (2003), Stephen Davies (2004) and Robert Stecker (2000).

the definitions of the specific arts. But there is no entailment one way or the other; ‘counting against’ and ‘spilling over’ are not logical relations.

Just as Weitz before him acknowledged that some *subcategories* of art may be given necessary and sufficient conditions even if ‘art’ in general cannot—for example, there are specifiable criteria for a text to be considered a Greek tragedy—so does Pierce acknowledge that some poetic *forms* may be defined, by their intrinsic features, even if poetry in general cannot. The English villanelle, for instance, is a fixed-form poem of nineteen lines written in tercets and with two recurring rhymes that occur in the first and third lines of the first stanza. These two lines alternate in third-line position for the remaining tercets, until they meet again as the final two lines of the poem.³⁴ To be a villanelle is to be a poem written in this form: ‘All villanelles have that pattern, and all poems having that pattern are villanelles’ (153). This is half-true of the villanelle, and probably entirely true of other fixed forms such as the sonnet. While it is correct that all poems following that pattern are villanelles, not all villanelles have that pattern, even in the English language. Poets are artists, and artists experiment: some have tried to introduce metrical variations, others did away with rhyme. Nevertheless, they were experimenting *with the villanelle*, and not with the sonnet, so Pierce’s point remains apt, even if it must be qualified so as to distinguish traditional from experimental versions of the form.

³⁴ I say ‘English’ villanelle because the original French form shows more fluidity of form, in particular in the number of lines. Dating back to the 16th century, originally ‘villanelle’ was the name given to a rustic song or dance with a pastoral theme and the use of a refrain. By the following century it had acquired enough typical features to become standardized, and although it has mostly been considered a stanza type in France (hence the variation in the number of lines, since this will depend on the number of stanzas), it was imported into English as a fixed form. See Clive Scott (1993) p. 1358.

When it comes to defining not a fixed poetic form but poetry in general, many intrinsic features emerge as strong contenders for inclusion. Pierce himself considers six of them: rhythm, imagery, beauty, unity, strangeness or playfulness, and ineffable meaning. None of these, he argues, does the job of separating poetry from other literary arts: there is no ‘essential core of meaning’ of the word ‘poetry’, nor a ‘clearly delimited entity that is poetry’ according to Pierce (151,153). While rhythm, imagery, etc. may be typical features found in poems, none of them is necessary or sufficient for a text to count as one; conversely, neither does their absence from a text exclude it from it being a poem. Rather, he says, ‘What the term ‘poetry’ refers to is a group of publicly visible things in the social world that we call poems’ (152). Hence all we can do is see what these things are and learn to use the term on the basis of how newly encountered texts resemble them.

I will consider Pierce’s six candidates for defining poetic features in turn. I agree with him that none of the features he considers passes muster as a characteristic all and only poems must have. However, as I hope to show, Pierce’s analysis remains at a superficial level of poetic features, failing to look into poetry’s more fundamental workings, and so it will be instructive to review the features on his list. Moreover, even if we fail to find a feature *intrinsic* to poems that will set them apart from other forms of literature, we may still be able to accomplish our definitional goal on the basis of a *relational* feature such as the ones mentioned earlier. I will then argue that a *historically-grounded poetic intention* will provide us with the necessary and sufficient conditions for a satisfactory definition of poetry. If my definition is right, it will in addition provide a partial explanation for what is the ubiquitous characteristic

of all poetries of the world—the use of repetition schemes. In the following chapter I follow this thread into matters of language and psychology as a way of showing why repetition has enjoyed a universality and permanence not matched by formal features in any of the other arts.

iii. Pierce's Family Resemblance Approach to Poetry

Pierce investigates six possible ways poetry could be defined. First, he analyzes five features he takes to be typical of poems—rhythm, imagery, beauty, linguistic unity, strangeness or playfulness. He dismisses, with good reason, the possibility that any of these could by itself make a text a poem: none of them are peculiar to poetry or even literature in general. Rhythm is a musical concept; imagery may be used to refer to painting; beauty is, of course, not even restricted to art works; linguistic unity may be found in novels or essays; and a myriad of things may be considered strange or playful. But, while not sufficient, perhaps one or more of these traits are necessary for a group of words to be poetry, and so it is this possibility that Pierce analyzes. He then considers the defeatist view that the essence of poetry is ineffable, and that we just somehow know how to apply the concept when we encounter texts.

Consider the rhythm that poetry is apt to produce with line breaks, rhyme schemes, and metrical patterns, as in the following stanza from Thomas Wyatt's 'What Should I say', whose short, rhymed lines in iambic dimeter create a sing-song effect:

What should I say
Since faith is dead
And truth away
From you is fled?
Should I be led
With doubleness?

Nay, nay, Mistress!³⁵

Pierce acknowledges that ‘For a text to be a poem, it must be rhythmic’; but, he claims, it is not possible to specify the *kind* of rhythm a text must have to be a poem rather than, say, the prose of Dickens or Faulkner or the Declaration of Independence (155). Indeed, he says, for any text even to be literary, it must be rhythmic (id.). But whether or not we can give specific criteria for a rhythm to be poetic rhythm, the claim that texts must be rhythmic to count as literary seems somewhat farfetched, and liable to the same sort of criticism that Pierce advances against distinguishing between poetic rhythm in particular and literary rhythm in general. For just as we may be unable to draw a line in that case, how are we supposed to draw a line between literary prose rhythm and the rhythm of non-literary prose and even just plain speech? Pierce does not clarify what conception of rhythm he has in mind, but at least in some general sense of ‘rhythm’, it will be the case that every linguistic utterance has one. Syllables have different weights, lengths, and pitches, and each speaker of a language has his or her own speech cadence. Individual differences share enough similarity to group together into local, regional, and national accents—the rhythms of a people’s speech. The existence of accents is material evidence that there are rhythms already at work in plain speech. So it cannot be the case that a text must be rhythmic in order to be literary, for a literary text just *is* rhythmic by virtue of being a text. Hence its being rhythmic will not set it apart from non-literary texts.

Of course, an author may, and often will, pay attention to how his sentences sound when read out loud. Versified poetry in particular adds an entirely new layer of cadence to what is already found naturally in language. Some prosodists have viewed

³⁵ Ferguson et al. (1996), p. 119f.

this addition as an artificial imposition (and the artifice has been viewed as both a positive and a negative characteristic of verse); more recently, linguists are taking the view that, rather than an imposition, devices such as meter capture phonetic patterns already at work in ordinary language. It seems rather that both prosodists and linguists are right: meter could not exist unless syllables did in fact vary in weight and length when uttered, since it involves alternating strong and weak (stressed/long and unstressed/short) syllables in groups of two or more. Moreover, the constructed patterns must be possible in the language: that is, there must be words that fit, say, the iambic foot, either alone or in combination ('per-háps', 'the crów'), for the poet must be able to construct iambic lines. If the stress patterns of the words and sentences in a given language tend to be 'weak-strong', then the iambic foot and meter will sound more natural to speakers of that language (perhaps even go unperceived if it is not called attention to) and be easier to produce than alternative types of meter. We should also expect its use to be more common. This is one reason why the iambic foot has held sway over English verse for centuries—since, indeed, the language itself changed its stress system as it lost most of its inflected endings.³⁶ The natural rhythms of language notwithstanding, a metrical scheme is a grouping that a writer consciously chooses or creates, and as such it involves manipulation and artifice so that what is said may conform to a previously selected pattern.

Not all poetry, however, is written in metrical verse (which is not to say that so-called 'free verse' has no rhythmic pattern; it is merely 'free' from traditional poetic forms). Nevertheless, is it true that we cannot specify criteria for a rhythm to count as poetic rather than generally literary? It depends on whether we understand

³⁶ See Kiparsky 1981.

this question as requiring a specific rhythm or rhythm in general. Clearly we cannot stipulate that for a text to be a poem it must be written in iambic pentameter—or even that it be written in metrical verse at all. But perhaps we can say that a poem is a text whose rhythm—whatever it is—is borne centrally in mind by the poet during creation. This leaves room for rhythmic variation from poem to poem, while accounting for line breaks, alliterations, rhyme schemes, and the many other poetic devices available to the poet: devices used to create that additional layer of rhythm. Moreover, the centrality of this concern seems to be one of the characteristics that sets poets apart from novelists, essayists, and other literary writers. While these latter may, and indeed often do, concern themselves with the rhythm of their sentences in a *primary* way for parts of their texts, that concern seems to take a *secondary* role to other ones for the greater part of their works. The poet, insofar as she must (minimally) have justification to break the line at this word rather than the next, must bear that rhythm in mind for the entirety of the poem. Even the prose poet must have a rhythmic reason *not* to break the lines (though these need not be her only reasons).

In sum, Pierce is right that rhythm alone won't make a poem—anyone may write metrical gibberish. More importantly, a novelist may well choose to make linguistic rhythm a central concern throughout his novel. That will hardly turn his novel into a poem, if he intended to write a novel (I will return to the issues of intention and rhythm later in this chapter). Pierce nevertheless fails to appreciate the nature of language and speech when he claims that a text must be rhythmic in order to be literary. Any text just *is* rhythmic insofar as it is a text, for the same reason that any utterance is rhythmic insofar as it is an utterance, and this is because natural

languages possess rhythms. If he means that literary texts, by reason of being literary, possess an added, artificial layer of rhythm imposed by the author, then indeed it will be, at least in principle, a matter of degree how much 'rhythm per sentence' has been added by the writer. But as a matter of fact, there is as a rule much less fluidity to this gradation than Pierce suggests. The 'poetic novel' (or poetic prose in general), evincing the type of concern with the rhythm of every line that we find in poetry, is a rarity.

The use of imagery is another characteristic commonly associated with poetry. Imagery is often associated with metaphor and simile, as in T.S. Eliot's comparison of the evening, 'spread out against the sky,/like a patient etherized upon a table' in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. But not only: Tabidze's poem at the opening of this chapter moves directly to his images: 'Without love/the sun does not shine in the heavenly spheres'. Pierce rightly notes that 'frequently prose too uses imagery ... hence [the use of] imagery is not a sufficient criterion' for a text to count as a poem (155). Besides, as these examples show, the category itself is broad and somewhat vague, including both figures of speech and 'sensuously appealing language' in general (id.). In the case of imagery, it is uncontroversial that its association with poetry is a result of more frequent use, and perhaps also more, and more frequent, unusual types of imagery, than a result of its being a defining feature of the poetic art. We use plenty of imagery in everyday language. On the other hand, a poet may intentionally avoid imagery in his writing or inadvertently write a poem that uses none.

Next Pierce examines whether we should take a Kantian line and declare beauty a necessary element in poetry, so that ‘no text is a poem unless it is beautiful’ (156). The reason Pierce gives against taking this line is that ‘to give a definition of ‘beauty’ broad enough to cover all the texts we call poetry would result in a term so vague as to convey little meaning’ (id.). That is certainly true, though it is not the only problem with choosing beauty as the defining criterion of poetry. Spelling out what kind of beauty would be poetry-specific—beauty of imagery, beauty of form, beauty of message—would be hard enough, and most likely no description would be sufficient to set poetry apart from other forms of literary art. But, more importantly, beauty is today hardly a common feature or goal of poetry, literature, or art in general. The art of Kant’s time left no doubt that a concern with beauty was of paramount importance for artists of all kinds, and so it was natural that he should have seen beauty as something crucial to art status. Whether or not we are saddened by the fact that beauty has lost its central grip on art, twentieth century artists have made it undeniable that art can (and perhaps even should) do more than please our aesthetic sensibilities. This makes beauty a weak candidate for a necessary condition for art of any type. (This, incidentally, is an example of a *de facto* relationship between definitions of art in general and those of particular art forms. There was no *in principle* reason why a rebellion against beauty should have manifested itself across the arts in the twentieth century, but the fact that it did has demoted beauty from its place in a definition of both particular art forms and art as a whole. Of course, the effect on a general theory of art would have occurred even if this beauty-flouting attitude had cropped up only within a single art form.)

The unusually comprehensive unity of the elements of language frequently to be found in poems may give us more promising grounds to distinguish poems from the other forms of literature, and this is the fourth candidate that Pierce explores. It is not very clear what Pierce means by such unity, but one may surmise from his examples that he has in mind the schemes often used by poets to create parallelisms and connections between words and phrases, as in alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. These not only have the effect of inviting the reader to explore the semantic relevance of the linguistic resonances, but they also create connections among the various words, phrases, sentences and lines which contribute to producing an internal coherence. In addition to unity underwritten by formal elements, Pierce also seems to have in mind a unity of meaning, one evinced by the way in which, for example, what is expressed in the various stanzas of a poem is closely and intricately related, or how it maintains its tone throughout, as in ‘the meditative coherence of Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’ (157).³⁷

Unity, however, can be achieved by these and other means, none of which holds a claim to setting poetry apart from non-poetic texts, since they may be used by prose writers as well. As Pierce acknowledges, ‘alliteration can be significant in a passage of prose’ just as well as it typically is in poems; furthermore, he contends, ‘contributing to meaning is a matter of more or less, not a pass-or-fail test’ (157). Sometimes an alliteration can clearly contribute to meaning; sometimes it may be no more than a sound effect. More importantly for the view Pierce defends, there are many ways in which the elements of a text may hold together, and since none of them is essential to a text’s being a poem, we must take them together as a ‘family’ of

³⁷ Please see ‘Appendix II: Poems Cited’ for complete poem.

possible traits with typical possible effects, which are found in poetry perhaps to a greater degree than in prose, but cannot be used to set these apart in categories in virtue of their common usage in prose writing as well: ‘In short, to the extent that this criterion for poetry is plausible, it refers to a family of characteristics variously important to a family of ends. Hence it is consistent with viewing ‘poetry’ as a family-resemblance concept’ (id.). Naturally, the same could be said for four of the other criteria he considers, since rhythm, imagery, beauty, and strangeness or playfulness may all be achieved by diverse means and be used for different purposes. Indeed, a concept’s essence may be ineffable in various ways also.

Anyone familiar with twentieth-century poetry might be inclined to invoke ‘strangeness or playfulness’ as the distinguishing trait of the poetic art. Precisely such adjectives might come to mind when one reads Cynthia Zarin’s ‘Song’:

My heart, my dove, my snail, my sail, my
milktooth, shadow, sparrow, fingernail,
flower-cat and blossom-hedge, mandrake

root now put to bed, moonshell, sea-swell,
manatee, emerald shining back at me,
nutmeg, quince, tea leaf and bone, zither,

cymbal, xylophone; paper, scissors, then
there’s stone—Who doesn’t come through the door
to get home?³⁸

And playfulness emerges from the very first lines of Gregory Corso’s ‘Marriage’:

Should I get married? Should I be good?
Astound the girl next door with my velvet suit and Faustus hood?
Don’t take her to movies but to cemeteries
tell all about werewolf bathtubs and forked clarinets
then desire her and kiss her and all the preliminaries
...

³⁸ Ferguson et al. (1996), pp. 1882 (Zarin) and 1694 (Corso).

However, even if it were true that strangeness and playfulness define poetry, defining strangeness and playfulness, and those of the poetic variety, would be a challenge in itself since, again, things can be strange or playful in a myriad of ways. But this view of poetry leaves out much work that is neither playful nor strange. Poems can be and often are of a serious, contemplative, romantic, or philosophical nature; the list is not exhaustive. Pierce is right to note that this view reflects ‘the Modernist valuation of the poet as rebel and iconoclast, a stance that defines Neoclassical poetry out of court, as it were’ (157). It is unlikely that anyone would have proposed strangeness and playfulness as the defining criteria of poetry prior to the twentieth century.

Finally, Pierce examines the ‘ineffable essence’ approach to defining poetry, or the ‘I know poetry when I see it’ stance (id.). According to this view, poetry does have an essence, but we are simply unable to grasp what that essence is. This does not prevent us from recognizing instances of poetry, however. We do just fine, for the most part at least, telling poems apart from non-poems, without recourse to a set of criteria to guide our judgments. This raises an obvious question: How do we do this? For Pierce, there are two possible methods: ‘we could be applying an intuitive grasp of what poetry is, matching up something we apprehend in the text with the ineffable thing that we recognize as essentially poetic, or we could be responding without conscious attention to the presence in the text of an ordinary group of criteria’ (157). There are problems with the first alternative which should be evident to anyone familiar with Wittgenstein’s private language argument. How do I learn about this ineffable essence so that I can use it later when I encounter texts? *Pace* Fodor, it seems clear that the concept ‘poetry’ is not something we are born with, even if we

somehow ‘lock’ to it upon sufficient exposure to poems. If we are not born with it, then the concept must be learnable (‘lockable’?), and so expressible in some public medium: I may see how you apply the concept ‘poetry’, which texts count as poems for you, and from there be able to distinguish which texts are poems on my own. If instead I had a wholly private criterion, ‘located in my personal consciousness, it is not clear how I [could] be mistaken in my intuition that X is a poem’ (158). In other words, if the criterion is my own and not something learned from my environment, and all I have to do is check a text against it, then I will always be right in my assessment of what texts are poems. But we are not always right—sometimes we fail to identify the categories to which texts belong—and we find that out by checking our assessments against those of others, that is, publicly. So the criterion, like the meanings of words in a natural language, cannot be private. Moreover, poems are cultural artifacts, and as such social artifacts—artifacts created by other individuals that belong to and share in a public culture. It would be strange at best if public artifacts could be defined privately in this way. We may perhaps agree with Pierce that ‘the ineffable criterion is simply a way of evading one’s responsibility to mean something coherent in using the term ‘poetry’’ (id.).

I agree that the essence of poetry is not something hopelessly beyond description. But I do not join Pierce in concluding from this, and from the analysis of his five criteria above, that we ought to accept his claims that ‘poetry’ has no essence (a definitional point) and that it is recognized solely by means of family resemblance (an epistemological one). Indeed, inasmuch as the notion of resemblance is itself a slippery one—things, including poems and novels, resemble one another in

innumerable ways—the claim that we recognize *x*'s by means of it can often seem vacuous. But even if we grant that we do make judgments about the various kinds of literary texts there are in a family-resemblance fashion, this does not mean that there is no definition of poetry to be found out there; as has been noted, the resemblances we see may well be underwritten by something we don't. As noted earlier, how we define *x*, and how we go about, in everyday life, recognizing *x*'s, are two separate questions. We recognize most things just fine without a specialist's definition, but we also expect that, if it came to it, the specialist would have a definition at hand to give us. While it is true that even the specialist sometimes may have nothing more than a 'working definition', this still does not make the two questions a single one, nor does it do away with the possibility of a definition.

Pierce considers several arguments against his pragmatic approach to a definition of poetry. According to him, the most telling argument against his view consists in the objection that defining poetry 'takes the numinous out of [it], reducing its nature to elements that can be publicly and explicitly expressed' (158). Properly speaking, this is not an argument against Pierce's family-resemblance view; it is an argument against *any* definition of poetry. That is, however we do it, by defining poetry we are stripping poems of their artistic power, which, presumably, can only work if the readership is unaware of the workings behind the works. Let us call this the 'magic' view of poetry. The magic view of poetry turns the poet into a magician whose tricks would lose their value, their 'Ohh!...' effect, once we knew how the guy pulled the rabbit out of the hat or concocted an alternation of masculine and feminine

rhymes.³⁹ It is surprising that Pierce should have thought this to be his strongest objection, since the magic view of poetry clearly has little to recommend it. First, it is not an established truth, or even a likely hypothesis, that knowing what poetry is would make poems lose their ‘numinosity’. Perhaps we should rather find poems infinitely more interesting and awe-inspiring by knowing what it takes for something to be a poem, and what it takes for something to be a good poem. Here’s an example.

Baudelaire wrote a poem called ‘Les chats’ in the 1840s:

¹Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
²Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
³Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
⁴Qui comme eux sont frileux et comme eux sédentaires.

⁵Amis de la science et de la volupté,
⁶Ils cherchent le silence et l’horreur des ténèbres;
⁷L’Érèbe les eût pris pour ses coursiers funèbres,
⁸S’ils pouvaient au servage incliner leur fierté.

⁹Ils prennent en songeant les nobles attitudes
¹⁰Des grands sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes,
¹¹Qui semblent s’endormir dans un rêve sans fin;

¹²Leurs reins féconds sont pleins d’étincelles magiques,
¹³Et des parcelles d’or, ainsi qu’un sable fin,
¹⁴Étoilent vaguement leurs prunelles mystiques.⁴⁰

A reader familiar with poetry but unencumbered by the burdens of knowing what a poem is may find ‘Les chats’ beautiful, amusing, mysterious; admire the rhymes and the images; and ponder the symbolisms involved and whether Baudelaire was really

³⁹ A masculine rhyme ends with a stressed syllable, a feminine rhyme with an unstressed one.

⁴⁰ ‘Fervent lovers and austere scholars/Love equally, in their ripe season,/Powerful and gentle cats, the pride of the house./Who like them are sensitive to cold and like them sedentary./Friends of learning and of voluptuousness,/They seek silence and the horror of the shadows;/Erebus would have taken them as his gloomy coursers,/If they were able to incline their pride to servitude./They assume in dozing majestic poses/Of grand sphinxes reclining in the depths of solitudes/Who seem to be asleep in a dream without end;/Their fertile loins are full of magic sparks,/And particles of gold, like fine grains of sand,/Vaguely fleck their mystic pupils with stars.’ Translation by Katie-Furness-Lane, revised by Jakobson (1987), p. 180.

talking only about cats. Now she encounters Roman Jakobson's analysis of Baudelaire's poem:

In the organization of the rhymes, the poet follows the scheme: aBBa CddC eeFgFg (upper-case letters being used to denote the lines ending in masculine rhymes and lower-case letters for the lines ending in feminine rhymes). This chain of rhymes is divided into three strophic units, namely, two quatrains and one sestet composed of two tercets.... The rhyme scheme of the sonnet in question is the corollary of three dissimulative rules: (1) two plain (couplet) rhymes cannot follow one another; (2) If two contiguous lines belong to different rhymes, one of them must be feminine and the other masculine; (3) At the end of contiguous stanzas feminine lines and masculine lines alternate: *4sédentaires—8fierté—14mystiques*. ... All the lines end with nominal forms, either substantive (8) or adjectival (6). All the substantives are feminine. The final noun is plural in the eight lines with a feminine rhyme, which are all longer... whereas the shorter lines, those with a masculine rhyme, end in all six cases with a singular noun.⁴¹

The excerpt is from the first of twenty-seven pages in which Jakobson does nothing short of laying bare the entire structure of Baudelaire's sonnet. It is perhaps idle to speculate on the basis of my own reaction to this analysis, but it is hard to imagine the reader who will not come to the end of it with an increased admiration for Baudelaire's poetic virtuosity, and a deepened understanding of poetry in general which can be brought to bear on the readings of future poems. Nothing numinous was lost; quite to the contrary, Jakobson's analysis makes one wonder whether Baudelaire was not indeed inspired by a muse to have been able to accomplish such delicate intricacy. Defining a kind and coming to an understanding of what it does and how it works does not make its instances less special than they were before that knowledge; if anything, it is likely to make them more so. The numinosity charge presupposes that an artwork's value is in direct proportion to how shrouded in mystery it is. In other circumstances ignorance might be bliss, but not here.

⁴¹ 'Baudelaire's *Les chats*', in Jakobson (1987), p. 181.

Not only does a definition not diminish a thing's value, it does not in any way alter what the thing is. This seems to be a concomitant fear in those averse to a definition of poetry or art in general. Poems will continue to be poems and have the characteristics that they have, and the value that they have, whether we define them or not. Human beings have not ceased to be human beings because we found out that we are descended from apes. Neither is the intricate history of our evolution any less wondrous than the idea of a deity creating us and everything else *ex nihilo*. A thing is what it is and, try as we may, we cannot define its essence away.

Following the pragmatic approach that seeks not to find an 'essential core of meaning' of the word 'poetry' but rather to aid the critical enterprise by looking into 'the way that people deploy [the term 'poetry'] in their speaking and writing, the work that it does' (151*f.*), Pierce now arrives at how he thinks people distinguish poems from non-poems:

If poetry is indeed a family-resemblance concept, then its definition should take the form of a list of possible attributes. Such an approach might be phrased in this definition: poetry is that form of text that rewards the sorts of reading and analysis we normally give to poetry. Of course such a definition would be circular unless one goes on to specify the sorts of reading and analysis. (159)

It is certainly true that the definition would be circular without such specifications. But it remains circular even when Pierce does specify these kinds of readings: 'When a good number of the readerly tools and methods we apply to poems reward our approach to a given text, it is a poem' (159). Some of these tools, he notes, are shared with non-poetry, others are peculiar to poetry (*id.*). If that is so, then how do we know which are and which aren't, so that we know which readerly tools to apply to a text so that they will tell us that the text is a poem? That must be known beforehand. And to

know this beforehand is to know that tool A is a poetry-identifying tool, and so the definition remains circular: to use a tool properly, we must know what it is used for. The standard answer to this worry is that we learn from paradigms. But if there are paradigms, why not look at them, and into the reasons that made them so, for an answer? Works of art do not become paradigms of their art forms accidentally. We might note also that we need not import value into our notion of paradigmatic works of art. A paradigm may simply be a work that is ordinarily accepted as belonging to an art form—regardless of whether it is trite or profound, boring or exciting—perhaps simply in virtue of possessing, to a high degree, the features commonly associated with that art form.

Pierce might argue that this isn't properly a definition, but rather an explanation of our practices. However, what Pierce offers is not simply a description of our literary practices. It is rather a guide to these practices. That is, what Pierce does is not merely to say 'this is how we do things'; he tells us instead that defining poetry by necessary and sufficient conditions is a vain goal and that we should instead, if we want to know what texts are poems, use the readerly tools that in the past have been associated with poems. If their use is fruitful, then we would have good reason to believe that the text before us is a poem. But as we have seen, this practical guide is uninformative. Nevertheless, Pierce's past-oriented regard is a look in the right direction, and I will return to it in my next section.

At various times Pierce conflates how we ascribe value to a work of art with how we define it. Developing his 'readerly tools' approach to sorting out poems from other literary texts, he points out that, as readerly tools may vary over time and

in different social circumstances, what counts as a poem will accordingly change (159). It is a question whether and how readerly tools do change over time and within and across cultures. But assuming that they do, and that such a change has an effect on what counts as poetry, that is still not the same as having an effect on what counts as good poetry. When Pierce, giving examples of ‘shifts over time’ in what we consider poetry, notes how T.S. Eliot ‘taught us to find poems among the heaps of occasional and pious seventeen-century verse’, and how feminists did the same with what earlier were considered ‘oceans of nineteenth-century sentimentality’ he is taking changes in how we evaluate poems for changes in how we decide what texts are poems to begin with: ‘In a curious way ‘The Exequy’ became a poem when Eliot and others taught (or retaught) us how to read it’ (159). But ‘The Exequy’ could never have become a poem if it hadn’t been one from the moment it was created. Nothing material changed about it when Eliot brought it to our attention. ‘The Exequy’ could never have become a novel, just as *Moby Dick* could never become a poem, no matter how well Eliot or anyone else taught us how to read it. What happened to ‘The Exequy’, rather, is that Eliot made us see the poetic value in it, taught us how to appreciate it. This has nothing to do with changing its categorical status.

Pierce recognizes later in his essay that such conflation of value and definition in his theory is problematic, for he points out that one may object that his view ‘equates poetry with good poetry, thus necessitating a category like verse or doggerel for failed attempts’ (160). He does not see this is a problem, however: ‘That seems to me a justifiable way to use the term ‘poetry’, and one well-established in past usage’

(id.).⁴² But between doggerel and good poetry there is a vast universe of *poems* which, though not *good*, are not doggerel either, and provide literary critics and editors of literary magazines with enough material for several lifetimes' worth of work. Even if one's express aim as an author is to write bad poetry, it is bad *poetry*, and not bad short stories, that one is writing. And if an author has the more common, if not so commonly fulfilled, aspiration of writing good poetry and fails, that attempt, again, is an attempt at writing (good) poems, not novels. A failed attempt is a failed attempt at some specifiable goal.

The following analogy may be illuminating. Imagine that John attempts to build a car. John's attempt might fail for any number of reasons, but that will not turn his attempt into a stab at building a paper airplane. Still, we are justified in asking whether his botched attempt at car-building is indeed a car. To what category do these failed attempts belong? And are they analogous to a failed attempt at art? In the case of the car, perhaps the right question to ask is under what circumstances we would be disinclined to call the final product a car. A car is a functional kind, and its function is to take one or more passengers from point A to point B; all the rest is comfort and accoutrements. So if John's attempt is indeed a failure, it is a functional failure, and it is under these circumstances that we would withhold the label 'vehicle' from it.

Are artworks, and in particular, are poems, functional kinds of this sort? Although artworks do perform important functions in a society, they are not, at least not necessarily, created with those functions as goals. While John's primary goal in

⁴² In view of this disavowal, it is particularly confusing that a few paragraphs later Pierce states precisely the opposite: 'It seems to me dangerous to make the degree of belonging to a category like poetry a surrogate for evaluation, not because evaluation is wrong or rationally indefensible, but because the category is likely to obscure the actual grounds for evaluation' (161).

building his vehicle was that it provided a means of locomotion (even if he had other goals concurrently in mind), an author's goal in writing a poem is not necessarily to have that work perform any function whatever in her community, even if in the end the poem comes to, say, enlighten its readers about the relative unimportance of human troubles. Indeed, not only poems but artworks in general need not have any pre-established and specifiable function even if that function relates solely back to the artist. For instance, the artist may create so as to express her thoughts and emotions, and so the function of the work will be to serve as a means to such expression. But that function need not be there either: the artist may simply be bored and wishes to pass the time by composing sestinas. So perhaps poems are better not seen as functional kinds. What I will propose is that they are best seen as intentional-historical kinds. In that case, (1) if a text is made with the intention that it belong to the category 'poem', and (2) that intention is guided by the history of the poetic art, then it is a poem, even if a bad one.

Pierce hints at an intentionalist stance when he suggests that we 'could define poetry by intent to reward' (161). This would clear the way to including 'the failures and mediocrities with which libraries are laden' under the category of 'poetry' (id.). It could also solve the evaluation/definition conflation just noted. 'Reward', Pierce clarifies, is to be understood as 'an indefinite term, pointing to whatever brings us back to poems to apply our poetic methods of reading' (160). But Pierce hastily dismisses the viability of an intentionalist approach to defining poems on grounds of the general inaccessibility of intentions (161). However, intentions need not be directly accessible to a reader for that reader to be able to infer that they were present

and causally related to the text at hand. It is true that we rarely have direct access to an author's intentions, where direct access is understood as verbal reports from the author concerning his work. In the absence of mind-to-mind cables transferring mental events directly from one individual to another, oral or written reports are as direct an access as we can get, in circumstances where they are available and we can take them at face-value. Such circumstances are unfortunately hard to come by. Though their works may live, authors die, often without leaving notes, journals, letters, or blogs on the internet where their every comma is discussed and dissected. Sometimes, too, authors are not the best source of information about their works: they may be mistaken, deluded, or even deceitful about what went on in their minds and what they ultimately set down on paper. So if authorial reports were our only route to authorial intention, Pierce would be right to pursue a road more fruitfully traveled by. However, as the constructive or hypothetical intentionalism defended by Levinson and others has proposed in regard to literary interpretation, there are other routes to an author's intentions concerning his or her oeuvre—in particular, the works themselves.

More to the point, as I noted early in this chapter, we must be careful to distinguish (1) how we define poetry; (2) how we identify poems; and (3) how we interpret poems. We may *define* poetry on the basis of authorial categorial intentions, and yet *recognize* instances of poems on the basis of a text's intrinsic features—or vice-versa. If we *identify* a text as a poem on the basis of categorial intentions, then there are different ways of arriving at those intentions, one of them being via the text's characteristics, another being via extra-textual evidence. The first alone, or both together, may provide sufficient grounds for settling the issue of whether a given text

is a poem or not. Another alternative is that we both define and recognize poems on the basis of authorial intentions. In any event, although related, the pragmatic problem of identification of particular instances of poetry is distinct from the general project of definition, and both of these are distinct from the problems related to how we should go about interpreting a work.

Poetic intentions had a chance of getting their due in Sartwell 1991. Taking Jean-Paul Sartre's comment that the poet 'considers words as things and not as signs' (246) as his starting point, Sartwell argues that 'it is the poet's intentions that constitute something as a poem' (250). Sartre's comment and Sartwell's thesis do not at first seem connected, but Sartwell brings them together as he sketches his notion of poetry-making intention.

Sartwell notes that words are abstract entities, and not material objects, as is (he says) implied by Sartre's remark. A poem is an abstract object, a type, not identical with its instantiations or tokens: 'if identical objects cannot have divergent properties, then the poem is not identical with any of its particular manifestations' (246). Neither is the poem identical with the collection of all its manifestations: 'to do so would be to identify the poem with a (perhaps massive) repetition of itself' (id.). The poem is rather 'that which all the manifestations of it have in common' (247). Nevertheless, Sartwell wants to retain the Sartrean insight that there is something material about words that is of crucial importance to poetry. This materiality cannot inhere in poems seen as types, since these are abstract; but it is precisely what tokens are made of. Consider what Dylan Thomas wrote of his first experiences with poetry, in the form of nursery rhymes: 'What the words stood for, symbolized or meant was

of very secondary importance. What mattered was the *sound* of them' (as cited in Sartwell, p. 249).

Thomas was, then, not concerned with the properties of words as abstract types, but with the properties of their concrete instantiations, especially sound, which is a perceptible property. This leads Sartwell to propose the following definition, where he combines artistic intention with perceptible, physical properties, thereby incorporating Sartre's idea into his view:

A poem is a linguistic type of which its creator intends that certain perceptible properties of its tokens be particularly emphasized in appreciation. These properties include the shape of the inscription of the poem and the sound of its recitation' (250, his emphasis).

So what distinguishes the poet from the prose writer is an interest in the physical properties of words, an interest in tokens as opposed to an interest only in the abstract properties of types (meaning, e.g., should presumably be a type property⁴³). The prose writer is concerned primarily with meaning, even if a degree of concern with the 'sound effects' of words and sentences is still present. For Sartwell, the poet, by contrast, is the type of writer or speaker 'who seeks control over the *physical* linguistic object, or at any rate seeks to take advantage of the *perceptual* possibilities inherent in linguistic tokens' (250, my emphasis).

Sartwell's definition thus accounts for the poem's visual properties as presented on paper (and these are particularly important in picture-poems and calligrammes) and for its aural properties as presented when it is recited. It does not

⁴³ However, given the contribution of context, it is not clear that meaning should be considered a type property, at least not exclusively. This may lead one to wonder whether all properties are not token, rather than type, properties. Yet, even if the type/token distinction is ultimately indefensible, there remains a distinction between perceptible and non-perceptible properties, and meaning will count among the latter.

specify what properties these must be, or of what kind, only that they be intended to be salient or of note to appreciators. Sartwell's definition is a three-pronged fork of poetic intentions, perceptual properties, and appreciators. To create a poem is to create a verbal art object intended to have particular effects on readers and listeners, and this will be achieved by perceptual properties created by means of certain established conventions: 'Poets *enforce* rhythmical and visual effects with the help of the formal conventions of poetry' (250, his emphasis). Sartwell does not specify what kind(s) of *visual* effects poems should have, but, as the cited passage shows, he does specify *sound* properties to be rhythm-creating properties, rather than, say, sheer cacophony. Meter and rhyme, he points out, are aural properties of tokens, and they are 'essentially repetitive devices' (253).

As will become clear in the next section, I am in agreement with the spirit of Sartwell's theory, particularly in what concerns the importance of poetic intention and the awareness that aural devices rely on repetition. Sartwell's view would benefit greatly from further development, however. Despite his own protestations—he 'insist[s] that it is the poet's intentions that constitute a poem' (250)—at times it is unclear where his emphasis lies: the poetic intention, the audience, or the formal elements of the work itself. It is also unclear the role that visual properties play in his definition and whether they could not be reduced to another, more general, property, one that would encompass both visual and aural elements. Furthermore, Sartwell's insistence on the importance of intention suggests a categorical distinction between prose and poetry rather than a difference of degree. But he seems uneasy to draw that categorical line between the two, and some of his statements bring the categorical

distinction into question. This emerges for example when Sartwell concludes that poetry 'is linguistic music. Poems are lilting, cacophonous [sic], brash, harmonious, and so forth, in ways that prose works, except very poetic prose works, are not' (253), and when he concedes that 'Of course, writers of prose are very often concerned with the sound of the recitations of their productions. But to the extent that they are, their writing is poetic' (255). By this Sartwell cannot mean that prose writers' works become poetry once they concern themselves with the sound effects of their sentences. Rather, Sartwell must mean that prose writers are following what are typical poetic traditions or rules, rather than prose ones, when they are focusing on sound. This again may be taken as blurring the categorial distinctions. However, intention is not a matter of degree: a writer does not intend to write something that is at one place or another in the spectrum from prose to poetry; a writer intends to write a poem, a novel, an essay, a short story. These difficulties might have been circumvented with revisions to the poetic intention. As it is, what is most problematic about Sartwell's account is that it would necessarily leave out certain *outré* avant-garde poems, some examples of which I will discuss in the sections that follow.

These reservations notwithstanding, I think Sartwell's theory of poetry is on the right track for emphasizing the importance of the poet's intention and of the perceptible, especially the aural, properties of poetic texts. In the following section, I will defend an intentional-historical approach to a definition of poetry, one to which I think Sartwell would be largely sympathetic.

iv. An Intentional-Historical Formalism

Of the various definitions of art proposed since Morris Weitz's challenge in the early stages of analytic aesthetics, Jerrold Levinson's intentional-historical definition appears the most promising.⁴⁴ Briefly, Levinson's proposal is that we define art on the basis of the intentions of an agent as these relate to the concrete history of art itself, that is, to preceding artworks. For the object of a creative or proffering act to constitute art, its agent must intend the object of that act to be regarded in the ways that previous artworks were regarded. He may do this either by intending his work to be regarded in the way or ways that some specifiable work or set of works has been regarded (whatever those ways of regarding them have been), or by intending his work to be regarded in specifiable ways artworks are or were regarded (whatever those artworks were); for example, 'with close attention to form, with openness to emotional suggestion, with awareness of symbolism', etc. (Levinson 1989, p. 21). In the first case, which Levinson labels 'opaque' or 'relational', the artist's intention relates his work to other, particular artworks; in the second, called 'transparent' or 'intrinsic', the intention involves particular kinds of regard or treatment, 'without having in mind or invoking intentionally any particular past artworks, genres, movements, or traditions (id.). The intentional-historical approach thus shifts the focus of definition away from intrinsic features of artworks—a move it has in common with institutional theories of art—and toward their relational characteristics. It parts ways with the institutional theories, however, in focusing on the intentions of artists rather than on the acknowledgement of art world institutions, grounding those

⁴⁴ The view is defended in Levinson 1979, 1989, 1993 and 2002. Critiques of it include Daniel Kolak 1990, Victor Yelverton Haines 1990, Crispin Sartwell 1990, Robert Stecker 1996, and Stephen Davies 1991.

intentions nonetheless on actual works of art and actual treatments of these works. Levinson's theory thereby avoids the pitfalls of intrinsic essentialism about art brought to light by Weitz (most notably, that it cannot accommodate the ever-changing nature of art), and has the additional advantage of not relying upon institutions such as the 'art world', whose conception is itself hazy, and whose existence follows rather than precedes that of works of art.⁴⁵

Defining art in general and defining particular art forms are two independent projects, however. We may be unable to agree on an intrinsic feature that is essential to all art insofar as it is art, and yet find a trait that, whenever present in an object, is sufficient condition to identify it as, say, a sculpture. Nevertheless, the two projects are naturally related, insofar as they both involve defining objects that belong in overlapping categories.

Levinson's intentional-historical definition carries over fruitfully from a theory of art in general to a theory of poetry in particular. I will argue that, given the substantial changes the poetic art has undergone in the past century and a half (particularly in the Western tradition), it is primarily by their being intentionally connected to preceding poems that some texts count as poems today. This is not to say that the theoretical transition from defining art in general to defining poetry in particular in an intentional-historical fashion is completely smooth; some changes will be required. They are, I think, changes in a good direction: a direction that brings more concrete features of this art form to the fore. For while we may be unable to specify any concrete features for an object to count as art *in general* (e.g., we cannot

⁴⁵ Defenders of the institutional theory of art include, most preeminently, Arthur Danto (1964) and George Dickie (1974, 1983).

say, to be an artwork, an object must be made of marble), for certain art forms a given medium, at the very least, may be a necessary feature. For an object to classify as a piece of music, for instance, it must be made up of sounds rather than paint.⁴⁶ Analogously, it would seem that poems must, at a minimum, be made up of words, since poetry is a verbal art. But this is minimal and largely uninformative (except, perhaps, to aliens on a first visit to our planet); moreover, some avant-garde artists I will be discussing presently have challenged even this seemingly innocent requirement. We must delve further if we are to distinguish poems from other types of verbal art.

How, then, can Levinson's definition of art translate into a definition of the poetic art? In one of its versions his definition reads as follows:

to be art is, roughly, to be an object connected in a particular manner, in the intention of a maker or profferer, with *preceding* art or art-regards: the agent in question intends the object for regard (treatment, assessment, reception, doing with) in some way or ways that what are acknowledged as already artworks, are or were correctly regarded or done with. (1993, p. 411)

As I have noted, this definition eschews the requirement of intrinsic features for something to belong in the category of art. It is purely relational: something is an artwork by virtue of its connection to preceding art via the intentions of an agent. The definition therefore remains at a very abstract level; no concrete traits of a formal, material, or functional sort are required to make something art today, even if in the past such types of traits were part of a definition of art (Levinson 1993, 412).

What I propose to do in transferring the intentional-historical definition of art over to the realm of poetry is to revise the kind of intention involved in poetry-

⁴⁶ As John Cage has famously shown, these sounds need not have been produced by musical instruments. I will return to this example later.

making and to enrich this intention with concrete features. This will not be to the exclusion of an over-arching art-intention, either of the kind defended by Levinson or of some other kind. Insofar as she is producing art, a poet may intend her work to be regarded in the way preceding art (including poetry) has been regarded, or she may intend to present it as a candidate for appreciation, or she may have some other art-intention. In what follows I will assume that the Levinsonian art intention is the kind successfully to fill the ticket, but we need not choose among the available possibilities for our purposes, so long as we bear in mind an overarching art intention. In other words, we need not decide which theory of art is correct, only that the work is intended to be art, or to be regarded as such. The importance of this overarching intention will emerge when we consider some unlikely contenders for inclusion in the poetic set. Insofar as she is producing a *specific* kind of art, namely poetry, a poet's intention will be characterized differently from however we choose to characterize her art-making intentions. Here, then, is my first pass at a definition of poetry:

To be a poem is to be a verbal art object intended by its writer or discoverer⁴⁷ for membership in the poetic tradition⁴⁸ or, in other words, in the category 'poetry'.

The first difference to notice is that the intention in the case of poetry moves away from the regards of art appreciators back to the artworks themselves. The agent's *poetic* intention with respect to her verbal object is directed at the object, not at the

⁴⁷ Just as there is 'found art', there is 'found poetry'. In the case of found poetry, it is the intention of the discoverer (in addition, sometimes, to some manipulation, as in the insertion of line breaks) that counts as the poetic intention.

⁴⁸ For purposes of the definition, 'tradition' is meant to refer to the *history* of poetry or, more accurately, to the poems that make up that history, conceived globally (rather than, say, the German Romantic tradition). In other instances, which should be clear from the context, 'tradition' may be read in the narrower sense of a given culture's poetic tradition but, in any case, understanding the term in the definitional sense should not interfere with the argument.

ways in which that object is to be regarded or treated (even if her overall *artistic* intention is to be so characterized). This in turn requires further elucidation. Without such elucidation, it would seem that the bare intention that a verbal object be a poem would suffice for it to count as one, even if it consists of pure gibberish. More seriously, the definition would appear to be circular. Naturally, this would be an unwelcome consequence. It is not, however, a consequence we should fear: for the proposed definition requires that the poetic intention be grounded in the poetic tradition—and in that respect it retains the historical spirit of Levinson's definition of art. To count as a poetic intention, then, an agent's intention must somehow relate to that rich and vast tradition. A writer's work must be intentionally connected to preceding poems in order for it to be a poem as well. How is that connection to be characterized?

Extending the analogy with the Levinsonian art intention, we may characterize the poetic intention as either opaque/relational or transparent/intrinsic. But, continuing my move away from the regards of art appreciators back to the works themselves and their features, I suggest that a writer may intend her work to be a member of the poetic tradition either by intending that it be 'like those other texts', without being able to pinpoint exactly in what ways her own work is meant to resemble those texts (relational poetic intention), or by intending her work to be a poem by intending it to have certain intrinsic features, features that, as happens to be the case, have been central to the poetic tradition wherein she wishes her work to belong (intrinsic poetic intention). It is important to note that, regardless of the opacity or transparency of the intention—that is, regardless of whether the poet's

intentions are directed to a set of works or to a set of features—the poetically determinative features of her work need not (indeed, ideally should not) vary accordingly. This will be the case if there is a feature shared by all poems such that intending one’s work to be ‘like those literary works called ‘poems’’,⁴⁹ and intending one’s work to have that feature will amount to the same thing.

In view of this distinction, it seems that opaque poetic intentions are more susceptible to failure than transparent ones. Imagine a wannabe writer who encounters poems for the first time. As chance would have it, all the poems he encounters happen to be about love and all use symbolisms involving the care and growth of plants. In every other respect, the poems in this set vary considerably: some are prose poems, some are verse poems, some rhyme, and some do not. Our wannabe writer now intends, ‘relationally’, to write a text eligible for membership in this select group. In intending his verbal artwork to be like the ones he has encountered, he intends that it be about love and that it involve plant imagery and symbolism. Given how varied these poems are in every other respect, he is unable to move beyond the topical surface to the general features that the poems do in fact share (even though he does not see that). Two outcomes are possible. One, his work, although made with no intentional concern for any centrally poetic features, may accidentally exhibit them; two, his work exhibits no concern for these features at all. In the first case, it seems uncontroversial that this author composed a poem. But I would claim that he wrote a poem even in the second case, since his intentions are still linked to poems (and not, say, to novels or newspaper articles).

⁴⁹ As will become clear later, ‘like’ here is not to be understood as some unspecifiable resemblance notion, but rather more strongly as the intention that one’s work belong in the poetic tradition.

Must an author be aware of having those intentions *as poetic intentions*, however, for her work to count as poetry? Not necessarily. Levinson's taxonomy of art-making intentions may be illuminating here. Distinguishing among specific art-conscious, nonspecific art-conscious, and art-unconscious intentions, Levinson allows for cases of naïve art activity, that is, the production of artworks when agents are unaware that art is what they are producing (Levinson 1979, p. 39). A *specific art-conscious* intention is an art-making intention whose agent is aware of the work or class of works he wishes his own creation to be regarded as: for example, 'intending for regard in the way wire sculptures are to be regarded' (id., p. 38). An intention is *nonspecific art-conscious* when the artist intends her work to be regarded 'in whatever ways any past artworks have been correctly regarded, having no particular ones in mind' (id.). Finally, an *art-unconscious* intention is an intention that one's work be regarded in some specifiable ways, and these are ways in which artworks have been or are correctly regarded, but the agent is unaware of this fact; for example, 'intending for listening with attention to timbre' (id.).

Bearing in mind that intentions may also be either opaque or transparent (relational or intrinsic), we may combine the taxonomies for an exhaustive table of possible art-making intentions, using this table to shed light on the array of possible poetic intentions. Opaque intentions, we may recall, are directed at a work or set of works, however these may have been correctly regarded, while transparent intentions are directed at the ways in which a work or set of works are or were correctly regarded. Opaque intentions therefore satisfy specific art-conscious and nonspecific art-conscious intentions. They cannot satisfy art-unconscious intentions, since an

opaque intention is guided by previous artworks, and so an awareness of these works as works of art is presupposed.⁵⁰ Transparent intentions most easily combine with art-unconscious intentions, since a transparent intention—an intention that one's work be regarded in certain ways, which, unbeknownst to the art-maker, are ways artworks have correctly been regarded—is the only possible avenue of explanation for art-making that occurs without the notion of art figuring in the maker's intentions. On the other hand, a transparent intention cannot be at the same time a specific art-conscious intention, since the one does not invoke any particular past artworks or genres, while such an invocation is precisely what characterizes the other. Transparent intentions not only combine but in fact do so redundantly with nonspecific art-conscious intentions, though, since both are generic types of intention, not connected with particular artworks or specific art forms, genres, traditions, or movements.

How will this taxonomy transfer over to a theory of poetry? It would seem that a *poetic* intention, insofar as it is poetic, cannot be art-unconscious or nonspecific art-conscious. However, this would violate not only the Levinsonian intentional-historical definition but also the facts. If it is possible to create art, of whatever type, naïvely, then it must be possible to create art of a particular type naïvely. And it is possible that one should write poetry without knowing it was *poetry* one was writing. Under a transparent reading of poetic intentions, revised to specify a concern for poetic *features* rather than *ways* in which certain types of texts—namely, poems—are or were correctly regarded, a naïve writer may intend to create a verbal art object with

⁵⁰ This is Levinson's line of argument, but we may question this assumption. I may intend my creation to be regarded in the way a set of objects A has been correctly regarded, without knowing that all members of A are artworks and correctly regarded as such. The scenario, though unlikely, is possible, and should count as a case of naïve artistic activity as well.

attention to certain features without being aware that concern with such features (whatever these are) characterize the poetic tradition. A different kind of naïve poetic activity may also occur when a luckier wannabe writer intends opaquely that his work be ‘like those other texts’ (where these are all poems) and, unbeknownst to himself, makes use of precisely the features that are central to the poetic tradition he intends his writing to be a part of. We may therefore revise the initial definition of poetry given above to accommodate such unusual cases:

A poem is a verbal art object intended by its writer or discoverer, *relationally* or *intrinsically*, to belong in the poetic tradition.

The revised definition now allows for writers at all levels of awareness of their activity to produce poems, from the writer fully embedded in her poetic tradition and aware of all the poetic possibilities at her disposal to the naïve writer whose creativity chances upon an established art form. As it is, however, this definition remains thin relative to the incredibly rich tradition it is meant to explain and encompass. To enrich the poetic intention, we must now make good our promise to move away from the regards of art appreciators to the features poetic works actually have. The poems from the various traditions exemplified in chapter two have revealed that the history of poetry is one of texts whose universal and enduring feature is the use of repetition devices. So to intend that my text belong in that tradition is to intend that it be made with a concern for, or an awareness of, those repetition devices.⁵¹ This concern can be evinced by following the tradition (say, writing in traditional forms), transforming the tradition (using repetition but altering forms or creating new ones, etc.), or rejecting that tradition (avoiding traditional forms, avoiding certain types of

⁵¹ As should be clear from the opaque/transparent distinction, this need not be awareness in the sense of being able to expostulate, e.g., on what kind of meter or rhyme one has used.

repetition techniques—say metrical patterns of any sort—or, most radically, avoiding repetition altogether). The next section will be devoted to explaining what I mean by repetition devices, why I have chosen them to characterize the poetic art (rather than, for example, Pierce’s many options in the second section of this chapter), and how these three ways of intending poetically are exemplified in the various poetic traditions around the world.

v. Repetition Schemes

Recalling the historical overview of the second chapter, and the examples given there of poems from our earliest historical records to contemporary publications, we will see the emergence of a pattern that is peculiar to poetry among the literary arts. Rhyme schemes, stanza forms, meter, alliteration, anaphora, parallelism, and the numerous other poetic devices are all *patterns of recurrence*⁵² that began with literature but have remained central to poetry alone. These patterns serve various aesthetic and semantic functions: they create rhythm (meter, rhyme), emphases and connections (rhyme, anaphora, assonance), and comparisons and contrasts (parallelism, stanzas, alliteration). Indeed, of the several features Pierce reviewed for candidacy in a definition of poetry—rhythm, imagery, beauty, linguistic unity, strangeness or playfulness—perhaps rhythm had the greatest chance of prevailing (although Pierce himself placed it at the bottom of his list). This is because many

⁵² I will use the expressions ‘repetition schemes’, ‘patterns of recurrence’, ‘recurrence’ and ‘repetition’ more or less interchangeably. When I use these terms, I will be referring to the kinds of repetition specified in this section and not just any sort of repetition. For example, the repetition of the definite article has not been a type of recurrence that marked the history of poetry, while the repetition of initial consonant sounds closely enough to affect the ear (alliteration) has. As will be made clear in the following section, this will not prevent a poet from writing a poem with types of repetition that have not been prevalent in that history.

repetition devices function in such a way as to create rhythm in a poetic text. However, repetition is a more encompassing feature, since the creation of rhythm is not the only function of repetition techniques.

Repetition has been a central aspect of every poetic tradition from its beginnings, and it is only for the past 150 of its more than 5,000-year old history that it has relented a little in its hold on the poetic art. Repetition is at the core of religious chants, ancient and contemporary; it is crucial to the oral traditions of the epic; it is the musical element in the lyric; and it is present too in poetic drama. Again, what is repeated in poetry varies: it may be an abstract structure, as in meter, line length, or stanzaic form; or it may involve specific sounds, as in rhyme or alliteration, or entire words or linguistic units such as phrases or sentences, as in anaphora. So repetition can manifest itself in a text in a variety of ways. What is remarkable is that, despite the enormous variety of poetry around the world, and despite the dramatic changes that poetry, and Western poetry in particular, has undergone since the nineteenth century, repetition remains a central characteristic of poetry. To intend to write a text eligible for membership in this tradition is, therefore, tantamount to intending it to acknowledge this central feature in some fashion, be it by following, transforming, or rejecting it. All other features commonly associated with poetry—profundity of subject matter, beauty, imagery, etc.—though they may be typical and even desirable ones, are not crucial to the poetic intention. This is not to say that they are not important: if a feature is typical, we will often read poems with attention to it. For instance, we often look to the symbolic significance of imagery and metaphors, since

these are common poetic traits. This, incidentally, reflects the way in which a tradition guides our experience of a work and the expectations we bring to it.

Since there are many kinds of repetition devices, it will be useful to sort these into categories or levels. I will sort them into two different groups, the first ‘abstract’ and the second ‘concrete’.⁵³ Abstract types of repetition consist in patterns which can be filled in by any syllable, word, or lexical structure, so long as they satisfy the criteria for that type. Concrete types of repetition involve concrete sounds, from phonemes to entire words and sentences. Repetition at the abstract level may be of five kinds. There is repetition organized by foot patterns, so that, for example, a marked syllable recurs after an unmarked syllable (as in the iambic foot, whose marker in English is syllable stress, or accent). Foot structures are combined with repetition at the level of the line, which specifies how many times a foot recurs and thereby specifies line length⁵⁴—in the iambic pentameter, the iamb recurs five times, creating a line of ten syllables (though elision and other poetic techniques allow line length to vary⁵⁵). Lines in turn recur a certain number of times and thereby contribute to producing a stanza type (e.g., a ballad quatrain) and/or a poetic form (e.g., the haiku). Line structure repetition need not involve meter, however; it may consist, e.g.,

⁵³ While there is nothing new in what I say here—we’ve long known what a foot is, for one—I mean to bring to light the distinctions in kind among the various types of repetition that occur in poetry. Interestingly, it is mainly abstract types of repetition that have been transformed or abandoned in modern times.

⁵⁴ Of course, we talk about line length today, but this is a consequence of writing. We should think of the poetic line more abstractly than that, if we are right to speculate that such breaks were originally (in oral traditions) meant to signify greater pauses during performances; line breaks are therefore their written equivalents.

⁵⁵ In elision, syllables that could be counted separately are counted as a single syllable, as in ‘prisoner’ (two rather than three syllables). Naturally, insofar as this is so, one may argue that a line that makes use of one elision still has ten syllables—ten *poetic* syllables, one might say.

in the repetition of a phrasal structure, as when each line must consist of a complete clause.

Repetition at the concrete level, involving specific linguistic sounds rather than higher-level structures, may be of three kinds. It may be *word-terminal*, as in the repetition of sufficiently similar linguistic sounds at the end of a word and/or of a line at specified intervals that creates rhyme. The Spenserian sonnet, for example, has the rhyme scheme *abab bcbc cdcd ee*, where three interlocking quatrains are followed by a final couplet.⁵⁶ There is also *word-initial* repetition, occurring at the beginnings of words, as in the repetition of consonant sounds (alliteration) and the repetition of vowel sounds (assonance). Finally, concrete-level repetition may involve the recurrence of *specific words or phrases*. The scheme below summarizes the various kinds of repetition I have noted here.⁵⁷

Abstract level:

1. Foot (iamb, trochee, dactyl, bacchic, etc.).
2. Meter (foot x # of recurrences = line length, as in dactylic hexameter).
3. Line structure repetition (metrical and/or of a syntactic element, as in parallelism).
4. Stanza (quatrain, tercet, couplet, etc.).
5. Form (haiku, sonnet, villanelle).

Concrete level:

5. Phonetic:
 - i. Word-initial (alliteration, assonance).
 - ii. Word-terminal (consonance, rhyme).

⁵⁶ The varieties of sonnet allow for different ways of conceiving of the stanzas. The original Petrarchan sonnet breaks the form down into an octet and a sestet, which in turn are divided into two quartets and two tercets respectively.

⁵⁷ I take it for granted that the reason why *these* kinds of repetition, and not others, have marked poetic cultures across the globe, is based on our psychology: how we process and are affected by sounds. But however cognitive psychology explains these facts, what matters for purposes of the definition I am offering is that, when we look at the history of poetry, what we see emerge everywhere is not the repetition of (again) the definite article, but rather the types of repetition catalogued here. Since this is what history shows us, and the definition calls for an intentional link to that history, then these are the relevant types of repetition, and not others.

6. Lexical or phrasal (anaphora, **epistrophe**, **ploce**, **symploce**, **epanalepsis**, **anadiplosis**⁵⁸).

Given these varieties of repetition, I will distinguish poems as formally *dense* and formally *sparse*. I will call poems formally dense when they make use of repetition at most or all of the levels specified above. I will call poems formally sparse when they make use of repetition at only some of the levels specified.

Consider the following two passages:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,⁵⁹

The great thing
is not having
a mind. Feelings.⁶⁰

The first three lines of Shakespeare's thirtieth sonnet are as formally dense as a poem gets. At the abstract level, there is an accentual-syllabic metrical structure which specifies both how many syllables each line has (ten), how often the marked syllable recurs (every other unmarked syllable), and how end-line repetition is patterned (*abab* rhyme). At the concrete level, there is the sibilant alliteration on 's' three times in the first line, and recurring in the second line once and in the third line twice; alliteration also occurs on 'th' in every line (thought, things, thing); there is consonance and assonance in 'thought' and 'sought'; and the first syllable of 'silent' in the first line is echoed by 'sigh' in the third. The predominantly sibilant sound of these first three lines is itself reminiscent of the sound a sigh makes, and so the poet makes us sigh with him upon reading the poem out loud. A closer reading is clearly rewarded by the

⁵⁸ The terms denote some of the ways in which words and phrases may be repeated at the beginning and/or end of a sentence or clause. I remind the reader that poetic and technical terms are highlighted when they *first* appear in the text to indicate that they are defined in the Glossary of Poetic Terms (Appendix I).

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, Sonnet 30.

⁶⁰ Louise Glück, 'The Red Poppy', from *The Wild Iris* (The Ecco Press, 1992).

recognition of such a technique and its relation to the meaning conveyed as well as to its effect upon the reader.

In the first three lines of Glück's 'The Red Poppy' we immediately notice the consonance on 'ing' at the end of each line, though the repetition does not echo as much as a rhyme traditionally does because of the short and enjambed lines; we read past the rhymes rather than stop at them, and so see here a poet working against tradition. We notice also that each line has only three words, and so are invited to look for the significance of that choice—for a thing so great, the line is unusually short—but one may presume that, not having a mind, one will perhaps have less to say! There are three nouns, 'thing', 'mind' and 'feelings', where the two 'things' are opposed to one another, although they are mentioned right next to one another in the same line. There are also two stressed syllables per line, in the first instance making up a regular bacchic meter (◡ / /), but in the second and third lines a weak extra syllable at the end in 'ing' and 'ings' takes away that regularity. However, none of these things recur in the following lines of the poem—all the remaining lines are longer by at least one word, and the bacchic meter is dropped. Glück's lines are formally sparse in comparison with Shakespeare's; there is correspondingly less to work with in relating technique to poetic meaning and effect. This is not to say that Glück's poem is less satisfying than Shakespeare's (I, personally, like it a great deal); my point was to exemplify formal density and sparseness and how the different levels of repetition work on a reader and relate to poetic meaning. Glück evidently writes in a style that is her own and does not conform to traditional norms. A reader's experience of her poems is enriched by that awareness, which may lead the reader to

seek out Glück's own way of producing meaning in her works. Nevertheless, as I have shown, the use of repetition is still present in that work.

The Western poetic tradition has undergone considerable changes since the mid-nineteenth century. It was around that time that poets began to let go of traditional poetic topics (classical myths, religious stories and experiences, bucolic love) and explore new ones (personal and national identity, the consequences of war for society and the individual, issues of abuse, oppression, and social conventions). Notably, poets at the same time began to move away from closed forms and traditional formal devices, which were now viewed as arbitrary impositions serving only to stifle personal artistic expression. We now begin to see poems written in **nonce-forms** created to suit particular poetic purposes, and poems that avoid line-terminal rhyme schemes. Indeed, we even begin to see poems that avoid line-breaks altogether, as in the somewhat oxymoronic 'prose poem' made famous by Charles Baudelaire.⁶¹

All these changes notwithstanding, one thing has not disappeared entirely from poetry: repetition. Even in the prose poem, where line breaks themselves are absent, internal rhyme remains, and alliteration and assonance predominate—perhaps to make up for the absence of explicit end-line rhymes. In early free verse, spearheaded in the English-speaking world by Walt Whitman, anaphora, or the repetition of words and phrases at the beginnings of lines becomes a marked feature. I

⁶¹ The story goes that Baudelaire's friend Aloysius Bertrand invented the prose poem with the express intention of contradicting the strictures of French neoclassicism, whose criteria to distinguish poetry from prose included, most centrally, its being written in verse, i.e., with line breaks(Mary Ann Caws (1993) 977f).

have highlighted the alliterations and the lexical and phrasal repetitions in the passages below, from Baudelaire and Walt Whitman respectively:

Sous un **grand** ciel **gris**, dans une **grande** **plaine** **poudreuse**, **sans** chemins,
sans gazon, **sans** un **chardon**, **sans** une ortie, je rencontrai **plusieurs** hommes
qui marchaient courbés.⁶²

Illustrious every one!
Illustrious what we name space, sphere of unnumber'd spirits,
Illustrious the mystery of motion in all beings, even the tiniest insect,
Illustrious the attribute of speech, the senses, the body,
Illustrious the passing light—**illustrious** the pale reflection on the new
moon in the western sky,
Illustrious whatever I see or hear or touch, to the last.⁶³

These techniques remain present in contemporary poetry, as in this passage from Susan Wheeler's 2003 poem, 'In Sky':

The girl presses out, inhales, **still** fills her **seat** not.
The **seat** is an ink room, not-girl, apprehension.
The girl is mottled with self, with indecision.
The girl's amethyst earrings window her eyes.
The girl twirls her cape **before** the **bull**.⁶⁴

We see from the examples given in this section how Shakespeare was both following and helping cement a tradition with his sonnets; how Baudelaire and Bertrand were rejecting some aspects of their tradition while retaining others; how Whitman, as Ezra Pound wrote of him, 'broke new wood', which Pound himself and many others, including Glück and Wheeler, have been carving anew ever since. We have reached a stage where 'following the tradition' consists in doing what revolutionaries such as

⁶² 'Chacun sa chimère' in Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose et œuvres critiques* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1965) p. 17. Ploce, or the repetition of the same word without change of meaning or grammatical category, with one or two words in between, is also evident in this passage with the word 'sans'.

⁶³ 'Song at Sunset' (*Songs of Parting*) in Walt Whitman, *The Works of Walt Whitman* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), pp. 443.

⁶⁴ *The Best American Poetry 2003*, edited by Yusef Komunyakaa, Series editor David Lehman (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2003), p. 174. Note that both Whitman and Wheeler use repetition also at the abstract level of line structure, since each line is composed of a complete phrasal unit (in other words, there is no enjambment).

Whitman and Baudelaire were doing over a hundred years ago, so that what the poetry of writers such as Glück and Wheeler shows both a rejection of what came before these modern pioneers and a conformity to what they have established since. However we look at it, what has remained constant is a preoccupation with making language do more than its ordinary daily job by adding semantic and aesthetic dimensions to what is said by means of repetition devices.

Remarkably, we find repetition schemes of the kinds catalogued in all poetries of the world, ancient and contemporary. One need not speak the languages in the following excerpts to see that all these poems include abstract patterning (line breaks, syllable-counting) and concrete repetitions (rhymes, alliteration, anaphora). There are also several types of parallelism, from interspersed matching line lengths to matching lexical categories (e.g. verbs or nouns grouped by position).

Ud-ri-a	ud-sù-du-ri-a
Gíg-ri-a	gíg-bad-du-ri-a
Mu-ri-a	mu-sù-du-ri-a

(Opening lines of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in Sumerian⁶⁵)

Llaxtay mana mama quchayux
 Rit'I Antin muyurisqa
 Q'apax Illimanin q'awarisqa
 Manatax surk'anniyux
 Manatax mama quchayux
 ('Mama qucha' by Eustaquia Terceros ; in Quechua⁶⁶)

Dhamiri imenifuga shingoni.
 Nami kama mbuzy nimefungwa
 Kwenye mti wa utu. Kamba ni fubi
 Na nimekwishachora duara.
 Majani niwezajo kufikia yote nimekula.

⁶⁵ D.D. Jones, 'The Pulse of Creation: The Poetics of the Prologue to *Ud-ri-a*'. 1998-99 Proceedings of the Red River Conference on World Literature Vol. 1, 1998-99. North Dakota State U, Fargo, ND. Available online at <http://www.ndsu.edu/RRCWL/V1/Creation1.html>.

⁶⁶ Quechua is the ancient language of the Incas, spoken today by about eight million people in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. It is the most widely spoken Amerindian language. This and the following two excerpts are from Freire, *Babel de Poemas*, pp. 150, 144 and 132 respectively.

Ninaona majani mengi mbela yangu
Lakini siwezi kuyakia: kamba, kamba.
(‘Dhamiri Yangu’, by Euphrase Kezilahabe, in Swahili)

Aku ini binatang djalang
Dari kumpulannya terbang
Biar peluru menembus kulitku
Aku tetap meradang meradang menerjang
(‘Aku’, by Chairil Anwar, in Indonesian)

There are, as one might expect, variations from culture to culture, and over time within the same poetic tradition, in terms of what types of repetition predominate. Alliteration, for instance, is a significant feature in most poetries of the world, but it is not a marked feature of Arabic poetry. These variations are the result of many factors, perhaps the most important of which is the prosodic structure of the language in which they are written. Clear evidence of this connection is the change from alliterative verse to accentual-syllabic verse in English poetry, a change consequent upon the transition from Old English (Anglo-Saxon) to Modern English. It is important to note that the list given here is not meant to be exhaustive. Other types of recurrence patterns have emerged, and other may still emerge. The kinds listed, however, predominate; a contingent, though not accidental, circumstance (I will return to this in the following sections).

The ubiquity of repetition in poetry across millennia and around the globe is considerable evidence for the claim that a concern with repetition is integral to the poetic intention. So, I propose, to intend that my text belong in that tradition is to intend that it be made with a concern for those schemes; this may occur directly (transparent or intrinsic intentions), indirectly (opaque or relational intentions), or both (mixed intentions). (Again, note that composing with repetition schemes in mind does not mean one ought to be able to expostulate, e.g., on what kind of meter or

rhyme one has used.) Concern with repetition can be shown by *following* the tradition (say, composing in traditional forms), *transforming* the tradition (using repetition but altering forms or creating new ones, etc.), or *rejecting* that tradition (avoiding traditional forms, avoiding certain types of repetition techniques—say metrical patterns of any sort—or, most radically, avoiding repetition altogether). Alternatively, in cases of verbal art created outside and without awareness of any poetic tradition (‘naïve’ poetry), a poem will be a verbal art object made with the use of repetition schemes; in such cases only intrinsic intentions involving recurrence are needed for a poem to obtain. We can now revisit the definition of poetry given earlier, and expand the poetic intention:

A poem is either (1) a verbal art object relationally or intrinsically intended to belong in the poetic tradition, by following, transforming, or rejecting the repetition techniques that have characterized that tradition (non-naïve poetry-making), or (2) a verbal art object intrinsically intended to involve use of repetition schemes (naïve poetry-making).

Naturally, a poetic text, like any text, is intended to be and do other things as well: be about the plight of urban laborers or move readers to joy; be composed in colloquial language or show erudition of vocabulary. But whatever its characteristics in these and other regards, whether a text is formally structured or in free verse, whether its repetition patterns occur at the abstract level of meter or the concrete level of lexical recurrence, a text is poetic insofar as it is intentionally linked to previous poems directly (relational intentions), indirectly (intrinsic intentions) or, more typically, both. Moreover, intentions that are transparent or intrinsic—which will be formal intentions focused on repetition—may also be ‘naïve’, that is, lack awareness of the poetic tradition (or of the existence of poems as such). This will account for instances such as those of the pioneer poet in a culture where the art does not yet exist and of

which there is no knowledge, and those of the Ur-poets of antiquity (I will return to this in the next chapter). Note that even the child's first verses, unless the child has never been exposed to poetry, should count as at least minimally opaque. On the other hand, a child who simply answers with 'Cool' a teacher who asks 'What rhymes with pool?' is not thereby creating poetry, since he is not thereby creating art. That is, although one may argue that there is at least a minimal concern with a certain type of repetition scheme in such a situation (namely, rhyme), there is no overarching artistic intention at work; there are communicative, rather than art-making intentions. So naïve poetry making intentions may be of two sorts: general art conscious, or general art conscious. In the first case, I intend x as art, but am unaware that I am also creating poetry, via intrinsic poetic intentions. In the second case, I intend x to be regarded in ways that, as it turns out, art has correctly been intended to be regarded (assuming a Levinsonian art-intention) and, again, x is created by means of intrinsic poetic intentions.

In most cases poetic intentions will be a mixture of opaque and transparent ones, since in most cases they will occur within the context of a culture that has a poetic tradition. On the other hand, instances of purely opaque intentions where the author fails to zero in on the properties of the works that guide her creation (e.g. she fails to see that what they all have in common is the use of recurrence schemes) will nevertheless result in the creation of a poem, since her intentions are guided by poems and her work is thus intentionally linked to them. In other words, relational intentions trump intrinsic ones, and relational intentions always involve awareness of a (historically constituted) set as a set, even if that awareness does not involve

(accurate, comprehensive) knowledge of the properties that make its members, members of that set; nor, naturally, need it involve acquaintance with all of its members.

This also explains the right of iconoclastic poets to claim, for instance, that the next twenty words they utter will be a poem. We should note, first, that their intentions are internal to the poetic tradition—they could not be revolutionary otherwise—and, second, that they are mixed with intrinsic intentions to reject that tradition in specific ways. Even if the acceptance of such ‘poems’ rubs against our pre-theoretical intuitions and makes little claim on our appreciation, their rejection would come only at the cost of theoretical consistency. Revolutionary poetic intentions such as these are fully accountable by the intrinsic and relational varieties of poetic intention, and as such they stake a claim to acceptance, however marginal their position in the poetic set may be.

In the interests of exploring these and other difficult cases, in the following section I will consider (1) whether repetition of the sorts outlined is the prerogative of poets; relatedly, (2) whether its boundaries are not blurred when, in other literary practices, writers make use of repetition devices; (3) whether a concern with repetition *must* be part of poetry; and (4) whether some other typical feature of poetry could not (or even should not) have done the job.

vi. Challenges

I have been arguing that the poetic intention centrally involves the concern with repetition techniques, and I have shown that such techniques mark the development and history of poetry in every culture that has a poetic tradition. We

must be careful to note that this does not prevent the use of such techniques by writers of stories, novels, and essays; by journalists, advertising copywriters, and, indeed, by all the speakers of a language. Language is the prerogative of all its speakers and they may use it as they will. There are countless examples of typically poetic devices being used in TV commercials and prose fiction, in news articles and philosophical essays. Alliteration, for one, is a constant feature in commercial advertisements and, in English at any rate, more or less regular iambs emerge everywhere, as in the mundane but perfectly regular ‘I’ll go and fetch the keys’; but that does not make us walking Shakespeares. A small sample should suffice to make this salient:

Dunkin’Donuts (brand name; alliteration, trochee)

Verizon Broadband: Richer. Deeper. Broader. (web advertisement; rhyme, parallelism, iamb to trochee)

‘U.N. Report on Zimbabwe Slams Slum Destruction’ (New York Times news article, 7/22/05; alliteration)

‘A word, a smile, a tender touch, / little things that say so much.
The thousand little thoughtful things / you do each day to please,
the way you rub my shoulders / or give my hand a squeeze...’ (Hallmark greeting card; iambic tetrameter followed by trimeter, initial couplet followed by alternate rhyme)

‘But oh, those Polaroid babies / taking chances with rabies,
happy to tear me to bits— / well, I’m calling it quits’ (‘Calling it Quits’, song by Aimee Mann; heptameter couplets)

‘Ao passar pela Glória, Camilo olhou para o mar, estendeu os olhos para fora, até onde a água e o céu dão um abraço infinito, e teve assim uma sensação do futuro, longo, longo, interminável.’ (‘A Cartomante’, short story by Machado de Assis; syntactical parallelism, lexical repetition)

‘Pour moi, je n’ai jamais présumé que mon esprit fût en rien plus parfait que ceux du commun; même j’ai souvent souhaité d’avoir la pensée aussi prompte, ou l’imagination aussi nette et distincte ou la mémoire aussi ample ou aussi présente, que quelques autres.’ (Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, Part I; alliteration, parallelism, lexical repetition)

The appearance of repetition patterns in non-poetic language does not efface the important intentional-historical difference between poetry and everyday language,

advertisements, and other forms of writing, literary and otherwise. Consider the various examples above. Although the intention to create a catchy brand name or advertisement, a saccharine birthday card, or a literary or philosophical prose piece *may* involve the intention to use repetition devices typical of poetry, it need not do so. The greeting card ‘tradition’, for instance, is parasitic on several other pre-existing practices, such as aphorisms and jokes; moreover, some greeting cards are blank. There is nothing unusual in blank, aphoristic, or humorous cards where no repetition device is present. The fact that there is nothing unusual in these alternatives tells us something important about these and the other practices exemplified in these passages, and about the intentions involved in the creation of these works. In other words, it is not a necessary condition of greeting cards (or advertisements, or novels, or philosophical essays) that they be made with repetition schemes. Nevertheless, when they do so, are they a fortiori poems? According to the present view, no: the categorial intention in such cases—a relational intention—is to create a greeting card (an advertisement, a novel, a philosophical essay), not a poem. Recall moreover that poetic intentions are embedded within an overall artistic intention, however we may wish to construe it (and I am assuming a Levinsonian kind of art intention). In light of this constraint, greeting cards, advertisements, and philosophical essays are automatically excluded. The presence of an overarching art intention is nevertheless perfectly compatible with the idea of using one’s art as a means to fulfill a non-artistic goal. Let us assume, for instance, that when Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* he intended his epic to work (also) as a treatise and influence his readers’ religious views. In a case such as this, the writer intends his work as art and also as a religious

treatise. What distinguishes Milton's epic from a greeting card written in verse is the presence of an art intention in the former case but not in the latter. Whereas every poetic intention is also an art intention, every verse intention is not: it may, for instance, be an advertisement or a greeting card intention.

Novels, however, are also art. Consider a writer who intended to be writing a novel, but wrote the entire text in iambs. This author, in my view, indeed wrote a novel. His non-poetic categorial intention overrides the evident concern with repetition which might mislead us to identify the work as a poem.⁶⁷ This, again, relates to the historical traditions different literary forms belong to. A concern with repetition is not a feature central to the tradition of the novel (or of the short story, or of the literary essay), and so an intention to write a novel need not be one in which the use of that feature figures prominently. Moreover, as was the case with the greeting card, appreciators would not be surprised *not* to find iambs in a novel.

Recalling the three ways in which poetic concern with repetition may manifest itself (following, transforming, or rejecting a tradition) may be illuminating in this regard. Consider an early twentieth-century English-speaking poet who avoids the type of repetition involved in, say, meter and rhyme. Now compare a contemporary novelist who does the same. Clearly these two writers are engaged in very dissimilar artistic projects. We would rightly see the poet as subverting an established tradition of metrical lines and rhyming schemes. In the case of the novelist, there is absolutely

⁶⁷ However, if there were line breaks, even if uneven ones (line breaks may be governed by syntactic integrity, number of syllables, etc.), readers would be right to call it an epic poem, a narrative written in verse. This author should not be surprised if his readership failed to categorize his work correctly. But it may also be that this author is attempting to invent a new literary category.

nothing subversive in his avoidance of repetition schemes, and readers would not notice the absence of such patterning. That is because repetition devices are not central features of that category, and so are irrelevant in the construal of intentions to follow, transform, or reject it, being also typically of no concern in appreciation. We may find prose writers ‘appropriating’ what are typical poetic devices and perhaps even metrically perverse ‘iambic novelists’ (or filmmakers: the entire dialogue in Sally Potter’s ‘Yes’ (2005) is in iambic pentameter⁶⁸). As a rule, however, we do not find in prose (or film) the attention to those devices evinced in every line of their work: they are occasional. In a poem, by contrast, concern with repetition techniques typically is present in every line, and is often down to the phonemes. The poetic intention makes that concern central and constant, not secondary and occasional, and appreciators would be right to attend to their presence as much as to their absence.

These differences being granted, how are we to handle song lyrics such as Aimee Mann’s above? Here, and in most lyrics, a concern with repetition appears to be central. It will not help to say that in lyrics the types of repetition are generally hackneyed and uninspired, invariably involve end-rhymes, and ones that a listener can often guess in advance (though occasionally a songwriter such as Mann will come around and conjoin babies and rabies). Not all poetry is innovative and inspired. What we must note is rather that lyrics are written for songs—the intention behind them is to write song lyrics, not poems. There is a musical dimension that not only is always present, it often is what guides the songwriting as well. It is true that

⁶⁸ Anthony Lane delivers a delightful critique of it—entirely in verse—in the 27 June 2005 issue of the *New Yorker*.

sometimes a text originally written as a poem will be set to music. Still, in such cases what we have is a poem set to music, not a song lyric.

Must repetition be part of poetry, nevertheless? Some poets have taken their rejection of the poetic tradition to such extremes that fitting their works into the category of poetry becomes a challenge. This is especially true of the literature of the various avant-garde modernist movements of the early twentieth century, such as futurism, surrealism, Dada, and concrete poetry. Surrealism and Dada championed automatic writing, thereby challenging the idea of a conscious poetic intention. A yet more irreverent Dada recipe for composing a poem was to ‘cut up a newspaper piece, shake the words in a bag, and reassemble them in the order they are removed’.⁶⁹ More typically, ‘writers’ of the *objet trouvé* or ‘found poem’ left aside the shaking and simply broke the found prose passages into verses, as in the following excerpt from Daniel Langton’s ‘What We Did’, whose words are from the January 1967 report of the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals:

22 cases involving
22 large animals
reported to the office
or located by officers

Horses: sick or injured, 5;
stray, 2;
overridden, 15.⁷⁰

As is generally the case with free verse, found poetry exploits the natural rhythms of a language; what this often amounts to are lines whose length corresponds to complete

⁶⁹ Anna Balakian, ‘Dada’, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (New York: MJF Books, 1993), p. 269.

⁷⁰ Barbara Drake, *Writing Poetry*. Second edition (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1994), p. 157.

phrases or clauses, as seen in Langton's reconstruction.⁷¹ As is the case with found art objects, in the case of found poems it is the intentions of the finder that establish the text's status as a poem.

Concrete poetry and futurism emphasized the visual aspect of typography and championed pattern poems and poem-pictures respectively, the latter perhaps a genuine hybrid art form (in '*Il pleut*', one of his *calligrammes*, Apollinaire placed the lines almost vertically on the page, each letter placed as the typographic symbolic equivalent of a raindrop). Futurism also promoted onomatopoeia and sound-poems, which could consist of made-up words, declared in advance to have no meaning (so that all that mattered was how they sounded), or sometimes entirely of vowels, as in a couple of poems by the Russian futurist Aleksej Kručenyx.⁷² Yet no one is likely to outdo Vasilisk Gnedov, another Russian futurist, whose '*Poema konca*' (Poem of the End) consists 'of a blank page performed with a silent gesture of resignation'.⁷³

For all their revolutionary zest, the modernists have all intended to write or perform *poetry*, and repetition remains a frequent feature of modernist poems. In Dada and Surrealism, for example, the call for automatic writing does not entail that the stream of words will be one where no word is repeated, as is evident in André Breton's 1922 '*Lâchez tout*':

⁷¹ Notice also how Langdon breaks the lines so as to 'create' patterns of recurrence, as in '22' in the beginning of the first two lines, 'office' and 'officers' at the end of the third and fourth, and adjectives followed by numbers in the remaining three. The first two lines are each composed of three words, totaling eight and seven syllables respectively, while lines three and four are composed of four words each, with seven and eight syllables respectively; this is a variation on the ballad stanza. There is, in addition, parallelism in 'reported' and 'located', and in 'injured', 'stray', and 'overridden'.

⁷² Gerald J. Janeczek, G.J. 'Futurism', *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 447.

⁷³ Ibid.

Lâchez tout.
 Lâchez Dada.
 Lâchez votre femme.
 Lâchez votre maîtresse.
 Lâchez vos espérances et vos craintes.
 Semez vos enfants au coin d'un bois.
 Lâchez la proie pour l'ombre.
 Lâchez au besoin une vie aisée,
 ce qu'on vous donne pour
 promising
 une situation d'avenir.
 Partez sur les routes.

Drop everything.
 Drop Dada.
 Drop your wife.
 Drop your mistress.
 Drop your hopes and fears.
 Scatter your children in a corner of the
 woods.
 Drop the prey for the shadow.
 Drop if necessary the easy life,
 What is presumed to be a life with a
 future.
 Hit the road.

One may, and with good reason, balk at poems such as those of Gnedov and Kručenyx, however. In the case of Kručenyx, how can a text with nonsense words count as a poem at all, or even as literature? It seems clearly to flout the ‘verbal’ object criterion stipulated in my definition. Works such as these are, admittedly, at the fringe. But I think the intentional-historical formalism offered here is still capable of accommodating them. Kručenyx’s meaningless-word- and all-vowel-poems may not be in any intelligible language, but I would not say that they are not *verbal*. The symbols he uses are, after all, linguistic and not, say, geometric or logical. They are *letters* that could be *uttered*, even if they mean nothing in any existing language. That they can be uttered is a fact of importance in the construal of Kručenyx’s poetic intentions. His poems are, undoubtedly, subverting a tradition. But inasmuch as he eschews everything, including meaning, in his poetry, and holds on only to repeated sounds, we may read his works as an attempt to distill poetry to what he takes to be its essence—patterned linguistic sounds (perhaps this is the closest poetry can get to absolute music!). In the process, one might argue, Kručenyx also shows us that the types of repetition he rejects, those involving meaningful sounds, are the ones worth preserving.

Gnedov's '*Poema Konca*' poses a yet greater problem for a definition such as mine. Imagine a writer who intended to write a poem by following Gnedov's piece (i.e. by means of an opaque/relational intention, guided by the work to which it is linked). What properties would she have to follow? A blank page—how is that a poem, and one that can inform the writerly intentions of those guided by it? If a writer is to intend her work to belong to a tradition by intending it to be 'like those works called 'poems'' when the poems guiding her intention have already rejected everything that characterized that tradition, then won't the properties that once centrally characterized that tradition no longer inform her intentions, and likewise those of the writers who follow her? If that is the case, then repetition will play no more than a contingent role in a definition of poetry.⁷⁴ Indeed, even the use of words would seem to be nonessential: an aspirant poet could change the oil in her car, call that activity 'Symphony #4', and claim it is a poem, one guided by Gnedov's 'Poem of the End'.⁷⁵ At least two avenues of response are open.

The first is to place '*Poema Konca*' in another category, claiming that it is a performance *about* poetry, but not itself a poem, in the way that John Cage's '4'33"', though *about* music, is not music.⁷⁶ This would remove Gnedov's work from the set of poems and enable the historical link to remain undisturbed. It would, in addition, make the hypothetical works above not poems, insofar as they would bear no intentional connection to any poems. This does seem to resolve the problem, but in

⁷⁴ I thank Berys Gaut for bringing this difficulty to my attention.

⁷⁵ I thank an anonymous referee of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* for this example.

⁷⁶ I thank David Davies for calling my attention to the possibility of adapting a position defended by Stephen Davies in 'John Cage's 4'33": Is It Music?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997): 449-62.

my view it does so at the cost of arbitrariness and inconsistency with the theory as it stands. If what grounds the definition of poetry is the intention to make one's work a poem, then on what basis do we discard Gnedov's intention (and those of his followers)? True, Gnedov is, we may assume, trying to tell us something *about* poetry, perhaps even about what he takes to be its essence. But that is not what makes his poem different from other, more traditional poems. Many poets have written about poetry. Gnedov is rejecting a tradition, but inserting his work in it in the process. He did not call it 'Painting of the End', or 'Song of the End', but '*Poem of the End*': i.e., he was aware of the tradition to which he was responding.

The other alternative is to acknowledge that Gnedov's work is, indeed, a poem, since connected to poems via Gnedov's relational and intrinsic poetic intentions, and to note that a writer whose poetic intentions are guided by his '*Poema Konca*' would be guided by this work *as it belongs in and is connected to* the history that made it possible: they would consequently be creating poems as well. This enables us to do justice to Gnedov's poetic intentions and to insert it in the tradition wherein it belongs. Poets guided by his work would not be guided by it as if it existed in a vacuum, but as it exists in its historical context; arguably, one could not even recognize Gnedov's work as a poem outside of it. They may therefore choose to follow Gnedov in his radicalism—which, again, cannot be understood as such outside of its context—or choose to reclaim some or all of the features he himself rejected. The proposal to define poetry on the basis of an intentional-historical formalism, together with the various ways in which the poetic intention can manifest itself, is thus capable of accommodating such extreme cases, along with the traditional ones.

It is true that this approach is a liberal one, and that relational poetic intentions virtually cannot fail on this view. But this is as it should be, if we are to leave room open for novel ways of belonging to a tradition or a category. We may wish to create a subcategory of ‘performance poems’ to accommodate ‘*Poema Konca*’ and the hypothetical ‘Symphony #4’, if we want to highlight the differences between those and more traditional poems. However we choose to proceed, it is important to note that, insofar as intentions, in general, may fail to be realized, poetic intentions may fail as well. The hypothetical poet could, for instance, fail to realize her intention to perform a poem by changing the oil in her car (she could, for instance, accidentally drop the can of oil just before her intended performance). Gnedov could have forgotten what kind of gesture he wished to use to symbolize finality, or he could have been inebriated and tripped on his way to the stage. So we should rather say that *successfully realized* poetic intentions have a virtual guarantee of resulting in the production of a poem (or a performance poem, in some cases).⁷⁷ The result may be ephemeral, and appreciators may find the poetic endeavor pathetic and aesthetically unsatisfying, or ingenious and witty. However, even if such borderline works are to be placed on the fringe of the category, we should recall that they are still intended as art, and as such, however minimally, will still bear an intentional connection to the type of art under which they are conceived.

Nevertheless, when we think about poetry we also rightly think of similes, metaphors, imagery, and the several other characteristics Pierce considered and rejected in the essay mentioned earlier in this paper. Why should the poetic intention not be guided by these, also prevalent, features? Although a concern with tropes may

⁷⁷ See Livingston (2005) for a discussion of successfully realized intentions.

and often does accompany poetic intentions, this concern is not, I would argue, properly called *poetic*, but rather *literary*. The reason for this is that, although tropes and other literary devices may occur more frequently in poems, they are also relevant traits of other types of verbal art, and so cannot perform the role I have here accorded to repetition. They are relevant in the creation of other types of literature (that is, they will inform literary intentions), and they are also relevant in the appreciation of other types of literature (that is, they will inform the interpretation and the evaluation of a literary work). It is equally noteworthy for a poet to avoid metaphors, or to use only cliché ones, as it is for a novelist to do so. So while it is true that, typically, an author's poetic intentions will involve concern for imagery, symbolism, metaphors and other tropes, and so on (even if it does so by avoiding the use of these rhetorical devices altogether), this will not characterize her work insofar as it is poetry; it will characterize her work insofar as it is verbal art in general. Concern with all those features characterizes literary intentions; concern with repetition devices characterizes poetic intentions. Poems can and have been made without imagery, without metaphors, and so on. As A.E. Housman has noted, 'Simile and metaphor [are] things inessential to poetry.'⁷⁸ The same may be said of the other tropes. So what I have said about poetic intention and repetition cannot likewise be said of those other features commonly found in poetry.

vii. Identification and Evaluation

Inasmuch as poems may be written with or (rarely) without repetition devices, and with or without similes and metaphors, the question of how we identify poems in

⁷⁸ A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), pp. 10f.

practice naturally emerges. This question, it is important to note, is to be distinguished from the issue of definition.⁷⁹ Readers or listeners may hypothesize that a text was intended to be a poem on the basis of textual evidence. This evidence may come in the form of use of repetition devices or any other typical poetic features. Perhaps line breaks are the only clue a reader needs, or the only one she finds to justify her categorization. Perhaps there are striking metaphors and imagery; perhaps there are rhymes. Appreciators may hypothesize to categorial poetic intentions on the basis of many features besides concern with repetition devices and correctly identify poems. But this does not mean that a reader will always sort the poems from the non-poems infallibly. Identification can be tricky and we can be mistaken in very radical, novel or borderline cases. There is room for misidentification, and that reflects the way things are—as in the case of the janitor who mistakenly cleaned away an installation piece in an art gallery. This incident is amusing but clear evidence that what defines *x* and how we recognize instances of *x* are two different issues. A poem does not cease to be a poem because we fail to identify it as such. Perhaps others in the future will be more attuned to its poetic properties—perhaps others in the past have been. On the other hand, a poet may fail in various ways and for various

⁷⁹ This is not to say that they are not related. See, e.g., Gregory Currie, 'A Note on Art and Historical Concepts', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40: 1 (2000), pp. 186-190, as well as Jeffrey T. Dean, 'The Nature of Concepts and the Definition of Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61:1 (2003), pp. 29-35 and Thomas Adajian, 'On the Prototype Theory of Concepts and the Definition of Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63:3 (2005), pp. 231-236. My attempts here are not to offer an account of our psychological concept 'poetry' (which would involve how we identify, correctly or incorrectly, poems), but to offer a definition of poetry. See also Georges Rey, 'Concepts and Conceptions: A Reply to Smith, Medin and Ripps', *Cognition* 19: 3 (1985), pp. 297-303, reprinted in *Concepts: Core Readings*, ed. Stephen Lawrence and Eric Margolis (MIT Press, 2000) and 'Philosophical Analysis as Cognitive Psychology: The Case of Empty Concepts', chapter 3 of the *Handbook of Categorization in Cognitive Science*, edited by Henri Cohen and Claire Lefebvre (Elsevier Science, 2005).

reasons; we may accordingly either identify her text as ‘not a poem’, or even not a piece of literary art, or recognize it as a poor instance of one.

Given the central role I have accorded to repetition, one may naturally ask what consequences my definition might have for how we understand our experience of reading or listening to poems and the related question of how we evaluate them. For instance, given this view, would a poem with just one repetition be necessarily aesthetically deficient, and a poem with many repetitions necessarily aesthetically superior? I think such a conclusion would be misguided for two reasons. First, consider an analogy with painting. Color is essential to painting, but it is not because it has more or fewer colors that we find a painting more or less rewarding aesthetically. Examples of paintings that are nothing but monochromatic squares abound, and that so many instances of them exist may be taken as evidence (admittedly not conclusive) that aesthetic rewards are to be gained from them. The situation is the same with poetry. One repetition (say, an alliteration) well-placed is worth more than many repetitions poorly chosen. Bear in mind the different levels at which repetition may occur: poems written in closed forms are typically more saturated with repetition, so they have (at least in principle) more levels at which to promote and reward aesthetic attention. So the definition offered, while not value-based, provides a criterion for evaluation: a critic may evaluate the quality of a poem on the basis of (among other things) how repetition devices were handled in it—skill in handling a stanzaic form, novelty in creating new ways of manipulating a metrical structure or in creating new ones, and so on. Repetition is indeed something we typically attend to as readers of poems, and it partly explains why second and third

readings are rewarded: expectation of (richer, different) aesthetic reward. That we take a distinct attitude toward poetic texts, in contrast to the attitude we typically take to other kinds of texts such as literary narratives and journalistic essays, has been corroborated by studies on metaphor. Gerard Steen (1994: 64-75) has shown that the same text yields more metaphors to readers who are previously told it is a piece of literature than to those who are told it is a journalistic piece. In an informal experiment, I have found this to be true of repetition as well: the same passage, categorized for one group as poetry and for another as prose, yielded a greater number of instances and kinds of repetition for those readers who were told it was a poem than for those who were told it was a prose passage.⁸⁰ But formal density and skill alone will not make a poem more aesthetically pleasing (or a better poem) than a non-formal poem. This brings me to my second reason why we should not subscribe to that conclusion.

On pain of stating the obvious, repetition is *only one* aesthetic dimension of poetry: a formal dimension. Insofar as it is verbal art, poetry is naturally more than form. Interesting, illuminating metaphors and similes are another source of aesthetic pleasure, as are the choices of words in general and what the poem conveys as a whole, whether it could be captured in a proposition, or is instead a general feeling or state of mind that could not be so captured. The debate over whether what a poem

⁸⁰ As I acknowledge, this was an informal experiment and I do not claim my results to be 'scientific'. I conducted the experiment via e-mail with two groups of ten people, half male and half female, half native speakers of English and half non-native but fluent speakers. I e-mailed them the following passage from J.D. McClatchy's 'Jihad', taking away the line breaks for the prose passage readers: 'A contrail's white scimitar unsheathes/Above the tufts of anti-aircraft fire./Before the mullah's drill on righteousness,/Practice rocks are hurled at chicken-wire//Dummies of tanks with silhouetted infidels/Defending the nothing both sides fight over/In God's name, a last idolatry/Of boundaries. The sirens sound: take cover.' In *The Best American Poetry 2003*, p. 120.

conveys or evokes can be paraphrased is immaterial to the present point. So a poem with many instances of those features which inform the poetic intention—repetition schemes—and few or no instances of what characterizes literature in general—interesting diction, imagery, symbolism, the use of tropes—is unlikely to have any claims to aesthetic superiority over another composed in the opposite manner.

What is not immaterial is the historical development of poetry since the various modernist movements just discussed. It is remarkable how the spirit behind these movements has endured, even if the movements themselves have faded into history. The new formal possibilities that Dada, surrealism, and futurism opened up for poetry, literature, and the arts in general, together with the revolutionary idea of art as a means of individual expression and a force for societal change, a source of novelty and a means to explore the unknown, were unthinkable prior to the late nineteenth century and yet today they pervade the way we think about art. On the less salutary side, however, modernism also created the misguided impression that in art ‘anything goes’. But a blank page backed up by a manifesto has substance to it—even if it is to be found in nothingness— whereas a blank page offered in no awareness of its artistic purpose is unlikely to count as anything.

Still, after a blank page, where can poetry go but back? There is a reason why these movements were ephemeral even if the spirit behind them has lived on. Once all the radical possibilities were explored, poets had to go back to grappling with their medium: meaningful sounds. And this has meant a return to grappling with the possibilities of repetition. It is perhaps not a coincidence that, in poetry as in music, those who have been trained in the classical tradition have been as a rule the most

successful in breaking new ground. As W.H. Auden remarked, free verse requires ‘an infallible ear’, and a well-trained ear is less likely to fail. So while repetition is not the only aesthetic dimension of poetry, it is a central one, and a poet is a writer who, among other things, is attuned to the possibilities of linguistic sound. Most likely, a poem that avoided repetition of any sort would turn out to be aesthetically deficient—a poem that would offer readers fewer aesthetic rewards. This is not to say that we should measure the aesthetic value of a work solely by the aesthetic pleasure it may produce in those who engage with it, or even aesthetic pleasure solely by the quantity and quality of formal devices. But surely aesthetic value and aesthetic pleasure, and likewise aesthetic pleasure and the formal dimensions of an artwork, are related, difficult as it may be to specify the particularities of those relations.

viii. Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the difficulties involved in arriving at a satisfactorily encompassing definition of poetry and considered two recent attempts to define the poetic art (Pierce 2003, Sartwell 1991). In view of the shortcomings of those theories, I have suggested a new approach to defining poetry. This approach adapted the intentional-historical definition of art proposed and defended in Levinson 1979, 1989, 1993 and 2002. Having sketched an outline of that view, I then proposed some modifications to it in order to accommodate its transfer from a definition of art in general to a definition of poetry in particular. In view of the history of poetry, the crucial revision I argued for is that the poetic intention be *also* grounded in an intrinsic feature of a candidate poem rather than solely in relational ones. The one feature seen to mark poetic traditions over time and across cultures is the concern

with repetition devices, or patterns of recurrence. For that reason I argued that an intentional-historical definition of poetry must make a reference to such devices. I therefore argued for an intentional-historical formalist view of poetry according to which a poem is either a verbal art object relationally or intrinsically intended to belong in the poetic tradition, by following, transforming, or rejecting the repetition techniques that have characterized that tradition (non-naïve poetry-making), or a verbal art object intrinsically intended to involve use of repetition schemes (naïve poetry-making). Various examples were given to show that non-naïve poetic intentions may take the form of following an established tradition, transforming it, or rejecting it in order to create something new.

I then considered some difficulties one could raise for my view. These center around the possibility that some other poetic feature might better deserve the role I accorded to repetition and the challenges created by poets who avoid repetition (or words!) altogether and prose writers who make extensive use of it. Recalling that this is ultimately an *intentional*, and not a purely *formalist* view, and that other poetic features are categorically and critically relevant to verbal art forms in general and not only to poetry, I showed objections of this sort to be without force.

An intentional-historical view is a backward-looking one and, as such, it naturally raises the question of the very first poems, just as it raised the issue of the very first artworks in general for Levinson. I have argued that naïve poets and first poets would be poets only by means of transparent intentions to create verbal art objects where the use of repetition schemes is paramount, inasmuch as one cannot follow, transform or reject traditions of which one is not aware, or which do not yet

exist. This moves us in the direction of a pure formalism to characterize Ur-poems. To put it briefly and somewhat simplistically, I suggest we may characterize Ur-poems as versified language made to serve various purposes: religious rituals, war songs, histories, and so on. Gradually, artistic purposes came to predominate. It is orthogonal to this proposal how such artistic purposes are characterized—whether in terms of expression, art-regards, the promotion of aesthetic experiences, or something else. While a pure formalism would be philosophically problematic in explaining poetry today, it is a matter of historical fact that it characterized the beginnings of poetry. We may recall that poetry and music emerged together, and that the early words for poetry in various languages indicate ‘making’ or ‘artifice’ (e.g. *poiesis*, in Greek) or ‘song’ (*shi*, or word-song, in Chinese; *mele*, air or melody, in Greek, besides, of course, ‘lyra’, one of the instruments that often accompanied performance and that gave us ‘lyric’).

Such historical facts about the earliest poetic creations naturally invite the question ‘Why repetition?’ Why should the first poets have zeroed in on repetition devices, and on the repetition devices that they did, and not others? Why should this have been the feature that endured, even in the face of great cultural changes such as the one brought about by the invention of the printing press? I think these questions, are best answered by looking into our psychology and the way we process language. Pinsky has suggested that ‘the technology of poetry, using the human body as its medium, evolved for specific uses: to hold things in memory, both within and beyond the individual life span; to achieve intensity and sensuous appeal; to express feelings

and ideas rapidly and memorably'.⁸¹ I think there is much to these ideas, and that the literary pioneers of antiquity did not arrive at the poetic techniques they did by mere chance. The psychology behind how we process sounds and develop our language skills, a psychology to be explained by the needs of oral cultures, made schematic repetition the inevitable feature of early poetry. So whereas poetry is defined by an intentional connection to a tradition, Ur-poetry may be defined by a psychological propensity to pattern language in certain ways—ways that are memorable, both in the cognitive sense that they are more easily remembered, and in the evaluative sense that they are pleasing. If repetition is also a way of adding levels of information without adding words, this would further speak for its cognitive advantages and consequently for its universality and endurance. I will explore these hypotheses in the following chapter.

I have argued that what makes a text or performance a poem is an author's intention to connect her work to pre-existing poems, and that such an intention will amount to intending to make use of, transform or reject the repetition techniques that came to mark the history of poetry around the world. Let me draw a final point of analogy with the Levinsonian intentional-historical definition of art. Levinson noted that the concept of art itself has changed, and what counts as art today would not have counted as art in, say, the eighteenth century.⁸² Criteria of beauty, for instance, have since been discarded. But while the eighteenth-century conception of art cannot accommodate some twenty-first century artworks, the twenty-first century concept of art should encompass all that has counted as art to this day and, ideally, future

⁸¹ Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry*, p. 9.

⁸² Levinson, 'Extending Art Historically', p. 411.

artworks as well. Levinson defends his concept as having distilled ‘arthood’ to its bare (relational) essentials in such a way as to fulfill that demand.⁸³ Likewise, the concept of poetry at work in the eighteenth century would hardly include much that goes by the name today. Poetry has changed, and our concept of it must reflect those changes. The intentional-historical formalist conception I have defended here has, I think, the analogous merit of distilling the poetic art to the one feature that has remained constant throughout its history and that should accommodate all future poetry as well. The eighteenth-century poet, to write poetry, *had* to use meter, but today’s poet must only take some stand or other toward metrical regularity. Poetry will, in all likelihood, change further in the future. But inasmuch as this is the tradition poets must contend with, their poetic intentions are unavoidably bound up with the artistic concerns of their predecessors.

⁸³ Levinson, ‘Extending Art Historically’, p. 412.

Chapter 4: Repetition and Poetic Effects

i. Reasons For Repetition: First Poets

In his search for a feature that would link together the vast number of incredibly diverse objects, concrete and abstract, that go by the name of ‘art’ in the world, Levinson concluded that ‘the common thing going on is the right sort of intentional connection to preceding art’ (1993, p. 411). Of course, preceding art eventually has nothing to precede it except non-art. The intentional-historical definition of art therefore has to contend with the problem of what Levinson called ‘Ur-art’, those first works created by virtue of something other than an intention that they be regarded in ways that previous artworks had been regarded. Levinson offers a couple of alternatives for handling this problem. While the Ur-artworks are not, strictly speaking, artworks—there are no prior artworks to which they can be connected via a maker’s (or profferer’s) intention—they can nevertheless either (1) be granted art status for different reasons, or (2) remain as non-art that is nonetheless the progenitor of the ‘first arts’, which in turn will be defined by reference to them. If the first, the Ur-arts will be considered art ‘not because modeled on *earlier* art, but rather because *later*, unquestioned art has sprung from them’ (1993, p. 422). So whereas art is defined in a backward-looking manner, Ur-art is defined in a forward-looking way. A danger of circularity seems to lurk behind the prospects of defining Ur-art on the basis of (later) art, and art on the basis of preceding art that is traceable back to Ur-art (even if the definition is not recursive). Levinson claims this is not a real risk insofar as progenitor and descendant relations are characterized differently. Whereas the

relationship of art to previous art is characterized intentionally, the relationship of Ur-art to what follows it is characterized historically.

The other alternative withholds art status from the Ur-arts, and has therefore to create a new, intermediate category, that of the ‘first arts’, in order to avoid the result of no art ever being made, since the intentions relevant to art-making relate to previous *art*, not to previous Ur-art (id., 421). The first arts are arts, differently defined: ‘their arthood consists in being projected for regard that some preceding *Ur-art* object (rather than some preceding art object) was correctly accorded’ (id., 422). While both approaches have their merits, it seems to me that the first one is the better of the two. The second approach, that of creating a new category (that of ‘first arts’) seems both unnecessary and problematic. It is unnecessary because the first approach seems sufficiently to account for Ur-art, and problematic in that it seems simply to push the problem of Ur-art a little further back by creating a new category that itself calls for explanation.

However one chooses to account for the relationship between our earliest, ‘proto-art’ (as a whole) and art (as a whole) as an established phenomenon and category, it is clear that the historical component of the definition of poetry (in particular) I have offered raises the analogous problem of ‘Ur-poems’, the first, ‘proto-poems’ which, naturally, were not created by an intentional connection to preceding ones, since there were no preceding poems. So how are the first poems to be defined? Is their situation analogous to that of the Ur-arts? Although Ur-poems cannot have been created with the intention that they belong in a poetic tradition, since there was no tradition yet to which they could belong, yet they were created by

means of the same features which became central to that tradition. For that reason, it seems that defining Ur-poems in a forward-looking fashion as the progenitors of all future poems is also the better option, in this case, of the two offered by Levinson. This in turn might land us in a purely formalist conception of Ur-poetry, according to which an Ur-poem would be a string of utterances held together by means of repetition devices. A formalist conception of Ur-poetry in turn raises at least two questions, one philosophical and one empirical. The philosophical question is: If Ur-poems can be defined in purely formalist terms, why not poems in general? The empirical question is: Why did the first poets choose these devices and not others? Why repetition? The philosophical question has already been answered in the previous chapter: poems cannot be defined solely as texts evincing concern for repetition techniques, because (among other reasons) other verbal art forms may make use of these techniques as well. Once the tradition had been started, the intention behind the creation of new poems became essential.

The empirical question therefore holds greater interest, even if not, on the surface, of a purely philosophical kind. However, if we find (empirically) that the devices the first poets used could not have been other than the ones they did, then we will have added a modal dimension to our definition of Ur-poetry and, by extension, to our definition of poetry. If, given our psychology, our language faculty, natural language, our respiratory tract, etc., we simply naturally manipulate and respond to language the way we do, then, it would seem, poems could not have been other than what they are. A related question is: if that is so, then what underlies our natural propensity to repetition? Two obvious possibilities are (1) cognitive usefulness and

(2) aesthetic pleasure. In other words, we should expect that repetition techniques emerged not simply ‘for the fun of it’, but were rather an important cognitive tool in the oral cultures where they made their first appearance. However, the fun of it, I will argue, was also an important reason why they worked as cognitive tools in the first place, and why they have endured to this day even in the face of their no longer being needed as tools of that sort.

Why, then, were our earliest poetic practices the way they were, and how did they spawn an art form? To answer these questions we must recall that when human beings first began creating literary works more than five thousand years ago,⁸⁴ literature was a purely oral activity. Without the benefit of writing, the transmission of culture amongst the members of a group, across groups and communities, and from one generation to another, was done primarily by speaking and listening. This placed a heavy load on our memory. It is difficult for us today to imagine what it must have been like to have to rely on one’s memory for everything; but if we look around us and take note of the large number of means of recording data that we have created over the course of our history so that we can free up memory space (for... other types of data?), that should give us some idea: stone engravings, wax tablets, parchment, papyrus, paper, books, paintings, photographs, computers disks, CDs, DVDs, USB keys, cellular phones, one-touch dialing, ‘remember my password’ shortcuts in web sites, automated reminders, and the good old ribbon around the index finger. We will take anything that will help us remember, or that (preferably) will do the remembering for us. As is the case with other human activities, when it comes to

⁸⁴ More accurately, what occurred at around 5,000 years ago was the beginning of recording those works; this speaks to a much earlier purely oral literary tradition.

speech—as children’s educators, psychologists and book writers know well—nothing aids memory better than repetition.

So, once we had language, and before we had recording media, we had to invent ways whereby our otherwise ephemeral utterances would gain some sort of permanence and be made more useful. And that is how, in time, much that needed remembering was composed in such a way as to conform to a repetitive structure, from legal documents to medical treatises.

In this chapter I will explore the question of how and why the first poems invariably relied on patterns of recurrence. I will do that by discussing (1) empirical studies on the effects of rhyme and alliteration on literacy development in children, and (2) the poetic practices of the illiterate troubadours of Northeast Brazil. I will then argue that there is a double-sided ‘memorableness’ to formal poetic devices: both in the sense that they aid memory and cognition, and in the sense that they are pleasing. I will also argue that the fact that they are thus ‘memorable’ can best be explained by the relevance theory in pragmatics developed in Sperber and Wilson 1986,1995. After providing a summary of that theory, I will explore its application to the issue of how poetry achieves its cognitive and affective effects.

I will preface my exposition in this chapter with a caveat: what follows is largely exploratory of what might best explain the prevalence and universality of repetition schemes in the poetic traditions of the world. Insofar as what I claim here relies on empirical studies, it is contestable at least to the extent that those studies may themselves be open to objections. The same goes for my reliance on relevance

theory. I will nevertheless proceed on the assumption that those studies and that theory are largely correct.

ii. Repetition Schemes and Literacy Development.

In this and the following section I will focus on two non-literate groups. The first group consists of pre-literate children under the age of 6. The second group consists of the adult illiterate popular oral poets of the *Sertão* region of Northeast Brazil, called '*trovadores*' or '*repentistas*'. What I hope to show is that we see in both cases what I suggest is a natural attunement to several types of linguistic repetition structures. In the case of pre-literate children, exposure to nursery rhymes (which have a predictable structure and abound in certain types of concrete repetition, particularly rhyme and alliteration) is shown to correlate with earlier and better linguistic competence, as evidenced in literacy development rates (Lyon 1995, Wood and Terrell 1998, Burns 2000, Wood 2000). Of course, that exposure would be of no use unless children possessed some rhyme detection mechanism. I would like to suggest that this phenomenon exemplifies what I will call a *functional natural attunement* to certain types of repetition schemes in language. By this I mean the attunement that we seem naturally to have to these linguistic phenomena, and that appears to be there for a reason: in the case of the children, for the developmental function it performs.

What we see in the case of the *trovadores* is an oral culture at work—one that cannot rely on the written word (since the population is largely illiterate) and must therefore rely on repetition techniques to transmit and preserve its traditions. Contrasting the functional natural attunement of the *trovadores* with that of pre-

literate children, we could say that in the case of children, that attunement is internal, or inward-oriented, insofar as it has its effects on the linguistic development of the individual, whereas in the case of the *trovadores* the attunement is external or outward-oriented, inasmuch as it is externalized by the individual as a social practice: one that (as the *trovador* seems naturally to know) *must* rely on repetition if it is to achieve its goal.

To show how this natural attunement to certain kinds of repetition schemes is exhibited in pre-literate children, I turn now to some studies in child psychology that assess the relationships between types of phonological awareness during pre-literacy and later literacy development rates.

Some terminological clarification is required before we proceed. Phonological awareness is the ‘broader awareness of sound structures in speech’ (Wood and Terrell 1998: 1). There are various levels of phonological awareness: awareness that sentences can be broken down into words, that words can be broken down into syllables, that syllables can be broken down into phonemes. Making a child touch a series of squares for each word in a sentence she heard as she repeats it is a way of seeing if the child is aware of word boundaries. Testing for phonemic awareness is slightly more challenging. Phonemic awareness is the knowledge of the phonemic structure of words, that is, of their smallest sound units that make a contribution to meaning. It is, for instance, the knowledge that ‘cat’ can be broken down into /k/ /a/ /t/. One method of testing for phonemic awareness is that of phoneme deletion. If a child can recognize a new word when a phoneme is deleted, as in ‘a-way’ = way, ‘c-

ar' = are, and 's-chool' = cool, that is taken to be evidence of phonemic awareness (id., 4-7).

Current studies suggest that children's phonological awareness develops from the larger linguistic units (sentences and words) to the smaller ones (syllables and phonemes). Indeed, some psychologists have suggested that phonemic awareness is too sophisticated a skill to develop as 'part of the natural progression of phonological awareness', requiring deliberate instruction, and thus occurring only when the child begins attending school. Others, however, have argued that formal instruction merely 'promotes conscious understanding of normally implicit procedures' (id., 2). The latter view seems more sensible, and serves to underline the fact that what is meant by phonemic 'awareness' or 'knowledge' in these studies is a knowledge *how*, rather than a knowledge *that*.

Several studies have shown that phonemic awareness can indeed develop before formal instruction, and that pre-literate phonemic awareness strongly correlates with literacy development.⁸⁵ Specifically, the kind of phonemic awareness that most strongly correlates with later literacy is rhyme awareness, followed by awareness of alliteration:

[Our results] support a growing literature which shows that rhyme awareness significantly contributes towards literacy (Goswami, 1994), discriminates between poor readers, reading age and chronological age matched control groups (Wood and Terrell, in press), and children who are less sensitive to onset-rime boundaries are at a risk of reading difficulties (Bradley 1988).⁸⁶

Rhyme awareness is therefore an important phonological skill, one without which a child's linguistic and cognitive development may be seriously affected. For instance,

⁸⁵ See Wood and Terrell 1998, Wood 2000 and Burns 2000 for sources.

⁸⁶ Wood and Terrell (1998), 13.

rhyme detection ability is the skill thought to underlie orthographic analogy use,⁸⁷ where a child infers the spelling of a word on the basis of another she already knows and that sounds like the first one (e.g. from ‘fool’ to ‘cool’). So if a child cannot detect sound similarities between words her ability to learn to read will be compromised. Wood and Terrell (1998) speculate that rhyme and rhythmic awareness may be connected:

both these skills require an awareness of vowels in speech ... It may be that rhyme awareness is an index of the successful development of infant phonological awareness ... If this were the case, then its ability to predict literacy development during the first year of school may have more to do with a fundamental perceptual skill, than with the exploitation of any analogous strategies⁸⁸

Other studies have shown that exposure to nursery rhymes correlates with phonemic awareness and consequently with reading ability.⁸⁹ As it happens, the most salient features of nursery rhymes are—surprise!—rhymes, followed by alliteration and a particular syllable-stress pattern.

A nursery rhyme is typically made up of one or more four-line stanzas, each with two to four marked syllables per line, an aabb, abba, abab, or abxb rhyme scheme (where the ‘x’ indicates that this line does not rhyme with the others), and, frequently, plenty of alliteration. This, the ballad stanza, can safely be said to be the most popular stanza type around the world, and possibly the most ancient.⁹⁰ Below are some examples in Russian, Hungarian, Maori, Portuguese, and English (with transliterations to the right where necessary):

Russian
баю-баюшки-баю

(transliteration)
bayu-bayushki-bayu

⁸⁷ Id.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See Burns (2000).

⁹⁰ See Worthington (1993), pp. 846-7.

не ложися на краю
придет серенький волчек
и укусит за бочок.⁹¹

Hungarian

Boci, boci tarka,
se füle, se farka,
oda megyünk lakni,
ahol tejet kapni.⁹²

Portuguese

O cravo brigou com a rosa
Debaixo de uma sacada:
O cravo saiu ferido
E a rosa despetalada.⁹⁴

ne lozhisya na krayu
priydet seren'kiy volchok
i ukusit za bochok.

Maori

E tangi ana koe
Hine e hine
E ngenge ana koe
Hine e hine⁹³

English (one for the adults...)

Johnny was a chemist
But Johnny is no more
For what he thought was H₂O
was H₂SO₄⁹⁵

The universality of nursery rhymes, sharing as they do such structural features, speaks to a natural attunement to structured linguistic sounds, and one that performs important developmental functions. Exposure to rhymes would have no effect on phonemic awareness if children did not possess what psychologists call a ‘rhyme detection ability’. That we have such an ability, and that we exploit it for the more aesthetic purposes of play as well as the more cognitive ones of language learning and reading skills goes some way toward explaining the emergence of poetry as verse. This inclination to rhyme, and to attend to what is rhymed as being of significance, performs a function at the individual level. But it also performs a function at the social level, and I will now turn to that.

⁹¹ Translated: Shush, shush/do not lie down on the edge of your bed/because a little grey wolf will come/ and will bite your hip. I thank Elena Volochay for this nursery rhyme.

⁹² Translated: Calf, colorful calf/having neither ear nor tail/ we're going to live there/where milk is sold. I thank Father Gergely Bakos for this rhyme.

⁹³ Translated: You are weeping/(Little) girl, (little) girl/you are weary/(Little) girl, (little) girl. Available online at <http://www.mamalisa.com/world/newzeal.html#hine> (accessed 6 July 2006).

⁹⁴ Popular Brazilian *cantiga*. Translated: The carnation fought with the rose/Under a porch:/The carnation ended wounded/And the rose without its petals. Unless noted otherwise, any translation from the Portuguese is my own.

⁹⁵ From <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A288966> (accessed on 6 July 2006), which informs us that the last line is “a very useful mnemonic device to remember what the formula is for sulphuric acid.”

iii. Repetition Schemes in the Practices of Illiterate Troubadours.

In this section I will discuss the poetic practices of the *trovadores* or *repentistas* of Northeast Brazil's drought-ridden backlands, the *Sertão* region. The *Sertanejos*, as the residents of the area are called, remain at the margins of Brazil's development in many ways, and that is evident in their literacy level, which, at an estimated 40%, lags considerably behind the country average of 87%.⁹⁶ The rural *Sertão* region has the lowest literacy level within Northeast Brazil. Yet a thriving troubadour culture exists in the region.⁹⁷ These Brazilian *trovadores* perform various functions: they form a particular kind of story-tellers, conveying news as they create mythological heroes out of real individuals (local and national politicians, for example—not unlike what 'Homer' made out of Agamemnon, Achilles, Odysseus, and others); they are entertainers, engaging in improvised poetic duels;⁹⁸ and they are instructors of the local population, insofar as they provide information about social and political events, language instruction (speech, not writing), and performance training to the new generations (not necessarily directed training but indirect, i.e. spectators learn by hearing their stories and debates).

⁹⁶ Sources vary on exact numbers: 'Literacy levels vary regionally and between rural and urban areas. Illiteracy is highest—around 27 percent—in the Northeast, which has a high proportion of rural poor' (http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761554342_4/Brazil.html). Indeed, according to more recent studies that refine their survey with four different levels of literacy, only 26% of Brazilians are *fully* literate. See data on the internet site of the Paulo Montenegro Institute, <http://www.ipm.org.br>.

⁹⁷ Please note that not all *repentistas* are illiterate. Some, typically those who either come from or moved to the cities are educated, and even travel abroad for performances. But most of those from the rural areas are illiterate, and often those who are literate have learned to read in adulthood, having long since been oral poets.

⁹⁸ '*Repentes*', from the word for 'sudden' or 'unexpected', as the ripostes from one's opponent tend to be.

These popular entertainers arrive without any instruction at sophisticated levels of recurrence patterning, both abstract and concrete. Indeed their rusticity is often the subject of their verses, as in the stanza below:

Meu verso rasteiro, singelo e sem graça	My verse, low, naïve and without frills
Não entra na praça, no rico salão,	Doesn't enter the piazza or the rich salon
Meu verso só entra no campo e na roça,	My verse only enters the country and field
Nas pobre paíça, da serra ao sertão. ⁹⁹	The poor houses, from mountain to <i>sertão</i> .

This 'low' verse turns out to be packed with sophisticated poetic devices. All lines have four stresses and follow an abab rhyme scheme. Lines one and three, with twelve syllables each, both end in feminine rhymes (last syllable unstressed), whereas lines 2 and 4, both shorter by one syllable, end in masculine rhymes; this makes the last stressed syllable always fall on the eleventh syllable (by poetic conventions, a last unstressed line syllable does not count, so all lines have eleven poetic syllables). Every line has a medial caesura, that is, a break in the middle of the four stresses, something that is made salient by the commas in lines 1, 2, and 4. The meter is strictly dactylic throughout, every line being 'headless' (missing the first syllable of the foot).

The world of the Brazilian *trovadores* is a window onto what is a long-lost past for most cultures. Unable to read, as was the case with the early poets, and performing for a people likewise illiterate, the *trovador* must take recourse to the techniques that will make his chanting memorable to his audience. In the case of poetic duels, a popular form of entertainment in the region, the poet's performance must indeed appeal to his audience, insofar as he earns his money by his verse. The following lines speak to the popularity of such events, and what is expected at them:

⁹⁹ Debs (1997), 10.

Umas trezentas pessoas
Em pouco tempo afluía
Cada qual mais desejosa
De assistir a cantoria
Cada um interrogava:
Qual dos dois apanharia?¹⁰⁰

About three hundred people
In a short time gathered
Each one more desirous
To watch the singing
All of them asking
Which one will get beat up?

Trovadores amuse their audience by putting the most creative insults about their opponents into verse form, and as one chants, the other plays the viola. Some of it involves goat tails, smelly mustaches, and other such physical disparagements, but much of the assault is directed at the verse-making of the other, and how unskilled it is in comparison with that of the speaker. (Such gatherings, incidentally, are not unlike American rap contests in form.) The only subjects off-limits are the opponent's family; sadly, on occasion such lines are crossed, and violent fighting may ensue. (Again, not unlike rap contests!) Besides duels, *trovadores* also earn their money by performing at restaurants, except in such cases they typically sing the praises of the patrons until some money is thrown into their strategically placed hats; stingy customers, however, get insulted too. *Trovadores* are widely respected as the local sources of knowledge as well as artistic talent, since they also go from town to town bringing news.

The Brazilian *Trovadores* can thus be seen as a contemporary version of some of the first poets. That they set their news, stories, praises and insults to verse can be seen as also showing a natural attunement to patterning language in certain ways, one that they direct outward as a means of providing information and entertainment to their communities. The reception they receive from their audience in turn functions as a reinforcement of their poetic choices and a stimulus to improve their craft—the

¹⁰⁰ 'Literatura Popular', *Encyclopedia Brittanica do Brasil*. (2005).

duels in particular can be seen as performing that function, since the better poet will earn more. So to the spontaneous creation of verse is added the incentive of the community. It is to initial circumstances such as these, in addition to those involving religious rituals, that I think we owe the emergence of poetry, and the development of ever more complex verse forms. The attention to and use of repetition schemes can thus be seen as contributing to language learning, as an aid to memory, and as a source of aesthetic pleasure.

iv. Relevance Theory: Synopsis

I have been arguing that ‘memorable-ness’ in its two senses is largely responsible for the central role repetition plays in Ur-poems. Repetition contributes to making lines and poems memorable both in the sense of making them easy to recall and in the sense of making them pleasing to the ear, and these senses exploit one another. So the key technical feature of poems appeals directly to our psychology; specifically, to our memory and aesthetic sensibilities. But poems also *communicate* messages intended by the poet. As is the case with artworks in general, poems are works which we strive to *understand* and which also frequently *move* us. I will now argue that the structured repetition of linguistic sounds and syntactic units also (1) facilitates both our understanding of what poems say and (2) helps promote our affective responses to them. There are thus two interrelated facets of these experiences to which repetition techniques contribute directly and which can be teased apart for analysis: the cognitive and the affective.

The claim that poetic features such as rhyme, meter or alliteration aid in the understanding of poetic messages and arouse feelings in listeners or readers is not

new. Roman Jakobson and the Russian Formalists all emphasized the ‘functional role played by structural parallelisms and contrasts’,¹⁰¹ and their close analysis of poetic traditions led to the observation that ‘various aspects of poetic form all involve some kind of recurrence of equivalent linguistic elements’.¹⁰² However, as Pilkington (2000) argues, the Russian Formalists were unable to go beyond the analysis of poetic form and the claim that it must have some effects on the reader to the analysis of how those effects are actually obtained. The intuition, while eminently plausible, had not been given a firm explanatory foundation, and without such a foundation, there seemed to be no clear way whereby one could show it to be true or false. This was not due to a theoretical inability to provide such an analysis, but to the fact that there was at the time no pragmatic theory that could ground it and no psycholinguistics that could test it.¹⁰³

The developments in linguistics in the latter half of the twentieth century created the possibility of such a foundation. The move from conceiving of language as a social code to conceiving of it as a psychological code and a system of mental representations heralded by Chomsky (1957) made possible a new kind of pragmatics—a cognitive pragmatics. It is here, as Pilkington (2000) and Kiparsky (1987) have argued, that a foundation may be secured for a theory of poetic effects. The cognitive pragmatic theory that could fulfill that role emerged with the ‘relevance theory’ of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986, 1995).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Pilkington (2000), 16.

¹⁰² Kiparsky (1981), 11.

¹⁰³ Pilkington (2000), 18.

¹⁰⁴ Hereafter ‘S&W’; page references given in text.

Relevance theory is a theory of communication that takes H.P. Grice's work in the philosophy of language (Grice 1989, particularly 'Logic and Conversation') as its point of departure. Grice had originally proposed that linguistic communication was a cooperative affair that extended beyond interlocutors' sharing a language and a context. They had also to abide by the same communicative principles, the most important of which was the 'cooperative principle': 'make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'.¹⁰⁵ Under this general principle Grice recognized several conversational maxims, falling under the categories of (1) quantity, (2) quality, (3) relation, and (4) manner, as follows:

- 1.a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the purposes of the exchange)
- 1.b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- 2.a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
- 2.b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- 3. Be relevant.
- 4. ['supermaxim'] Be perspicuous.
- 4.a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
- 4.b. Avoid ambiguity.
- 4.c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- 4.d. Be orderly.¹⁰⁶

For Grice, such maxims helped make salient an important distinction between what is said and what is 'implicated' by means of words, where the former is a matter for semantics and the latter a matter for pragmatics. Besides a common language and context, then, Grice adds an intentional dimension to communication, referring back to the minds of interlocutors; as Sperber and Wilson note, 'Grice put forth an idea of

¹⁰⁵ Grice (1989), 26.

¹⁰⁶ Grice (1989), 26-8.

fundamental importance: that the very act of communicating creates expectations which it then exploits' (S&W 37). One way in which a communicator may exploit common communicative expectations is by flouting one or more maxims. One could, for instance, flout maxim (4.a.) by being deliberately obscure, so as to avoid communicating something undesirable. We can see the flouting of maxims as evidence that, in normal circumstances, they are at work.

By asking the basic question 'What is the rationale behind the cooperative principles and maxims?' and proposing that they all reduce to the maxim of relation ('be relevant'), Sperber and Wilson developed the Gricean insight of explaining the communicative process by reference to the minds of speakers and hearers rather than to any shared social codes (S&W 36). Whereas social codes are learned, the presumption behind relevance theory is that minds are 'pre-wired' to work in a certain fashion, and that communication operates in an analogous manner.¹⁰⁷ We could say that the main idea behind Sperber and Wilson's theory is that what is true of life in general remains true in linguistic communication: we want to get as much as we can for as little work as possible. And, whenever we are made to work a little harder, we expect that there should be reasons for it and that we shall be rewarded for it: overtime work means extra pay. Thus there is, in every communicative exchange, an assumption of relevance: I expect the linguistic string I am required to process to result in contextual effects—it should tell me something: 'The assessment of

¹⁰⁷ Although Sperber and Wilson put forth their principle of relevance as a communicative principle rather than (more broadly) a cognitive one, as many have thought, they also believe that an analogous principle is at work at that more general level. According to the *cognitive* principle of relevance, human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance; i.e., 'cognitive resources tend to be allocated to the processing of the most relevant inputs available'. According to the *communicative* principle of relevance, 'every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (S&W 260-1).

relevance, like the assessment of productivity, is a matter of balancing output against input: here contextual effects against processing effort' (S&W 125).

There are many details to relevance theory, and here I will outline only what is pertinent to the discussion that follows. One important idea in relevance theory is that minds 'store' concepts in various interconnected ways. Concepts in turn collect information (as an 'address' in memory) lexically, logically, and denotationally, and they appear as constituents of logical forms when they are accessed. A concept's *lexical entry* indicates the word or phrase in natural language corresponding to that concept. The *denotational* or *encyclopedic entry* 'contains information about the extension and/or denotation of the concept: that is, about the objects, events and/or properties which instantiate it'; finally, the concept enters into logical forms, and thus there must be rules governing its behavior within those forms—the *logical entry* contains a set of deductive rules (S&W 86).

According to Sperber and Wilson, what is fully shared by speakers are the logical entries attached to a conceptual address and, when speakers share a language, the lexical entries as well. The encyclopedic entry, however, is peculiar to an individual, containing all that the individual believes to be the case about that concept. Naturally, encyclopedic entries, while they vary from person to person, must still overlap to an extent sufficient for communication, and may overlap considerably. If speakers shared only the information available at the logical and lexical entries attached to the concepts they have stored in memory, it is unlikely that their exchanges would result in the exchange of much information. While the logical entry provides (deductive) rules for the use of the concept, and the lexical entry the

linguistic tag that will be used for it, information from the encyclopedic entry provides the contextual information that will particularize the inferences drawn with it: ‘stereotypical assumptions and expectations about frequently encountered objects and events’ (S&W 88). For instance, the encyclopedic entry for ‘cow’ for a Hindu Indian and a person from most other countries will be very different. For the Hindu, the encyclopedic entry for ‘cow’ will involve the idea of a sacred animal, one whose meat ought not to be consumed (at least not by those who hold it sacred), and one who freely roams the streets in urban areas.¹⁰⁸ None of these three is likely to be part of the encyclopedic entry for, say, a person in most Latin American countries.

Thoughts, on this view, are ‘conceptual representations (as opposed to sensory representations or emotional states)’ (S&W 2). What Sperber and Wilson call *assumptions* are thoughts represented by an individual as representations of the actual world, as opposed to fictions, desires, or representations of representations (id.). This does not mean that an assumption may not be, in fact, a fiction—it only need not seem so to the individual. An assumption, then, is ‘a structured set of concepts’ (S&W 85). An assumption may be relevant or irrelevant in a context; it is relevant in a context ‘if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context’ (S&W 122). The fundamental insight of relevance theory is expressed in the extent conditions which determine the degree of relevance of a given assumption:

Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it is small. (S&W 125)

¹⁰⁸ According to PBS, 40,000 of them share the streets with the 13 million inhabitants of New Delhi. See <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/holycow/hinduism.html>.

The most relevant assumption is the one with the most optimal ratio of extent condition 2 to extent condition 1, that is, of effort to contextual effects.

In view of these distinctions, what is important for communication to occur is not that there be mutual *knowledge* about the subject of conversation between interlocutors, but rather that there be what Sperber and Wilson call ‘*mutual manifestness*’. A given fact ‘is *manifest* to an individual at a given time ‘if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true’; a set of facts manifest to an individual constitutes a *cognitive environment* (S&W 39). As Pilkington notes, on the relevance theory account ‘it is the communicator’s responsibility to judge what contextual assumptions are manifest to the addressee. Where she judges them not to be manifest she must make them available through further utterance’.¹⁰⁹ Communication occurs within such a sufficiently shared cognitive environment, and it involves an initial *decoding* phase (phonemic or graphemic representations are decoded into semantic representations and incomplete logical forms) and an *inferential* phase (filling in the gaps in the logical form so that, from the resulting propositional forms, conversational implicatures and propositional attitudes may be derived).¹¹⁰

In everyday communication, individuals address particular interlocutors, and so must be attuned to what may or may not be manifest to them so as to ensure the success of conversational exchanges. In the case of literary communication, an author does not have a particular individual, but a general readership. It may be thought that in such cases the burden lies entirely with text to provide a cognitive environment:

¹⁰⁹ Pilkington (2000), 63.

¹¹⁰ Pilkington (2000), 67; see S&W 12-13.

In the case of literary communication this detailed attention to the needs of a particular addressee does not apply. The text is carefully shaped by the author with a view to the effects it will have upon a reader, but this reader is, in the term familiar from literary theory, an *implied reader*. The context needed by the implied reader must be determined by the text itself.¹¹¹

Yet that requirement is too strong. It is true that, typically, an author does not have a particular addressee in mind (though lyric poems are frequently written for specific individuals, as are occasional poems such as eulogies and epithalamia, and a novel may be a message in disguise). But even if this were not so, no readership is altogether 'general'. An author must have an idea of who will read her work (who else will 'imply' the reader?) and, as rule and at a minimum, writers write for their contemporaries.¹¹² If this is so, and if writers also assume that their readership will be familiar with particular uses of language (say, slang, which is invariably local) and with specific cultural cues (say, what life is like in 21st century Porto Alegre), then it is also true that a myriad of contextual assumptions are left unspoken (unwritten), assumed to be manifest to the targeted readers. Just as no conversation could take off if every assumption had first to be made explicitly manifest between conversational partners, so no literary work could ever end, or begin, if everything had to be contextualized for the reader. The interpretation of works from different cultures or earlier times is difficult precisely because such contextual assumptions are not available to us and must be retrieved by research beyond the literary text. Texts, like conversations, obtain their meaning within a contextual environment.

Literary works tend to differ from everyday linguistic exchanges, however, in that they often require more cognitive effort from their readers than is usually the case

¹¹¹ Pilkington (2000), 63.

¹¹² Even Borges' fictional Pierre Menard did. But naturally he, and any author, may intend to write for a distant, past, or future audience.

in conversation. Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory predicts that any 'greater effort involved in accessing the intended contextual assumption is repaid by an increase in contextual effects: a wider range of implicatures being communicated'.¹¹³ How does this occur, and is it always the case that greater effort results in greater reward? With regard to the second question, it is a sad truth that communication may and often does fail in spite of great efforts being expended by both parties. So we should rather add a modal dimension to Sperber and Wilson's idea: it's perhaps more accurate to say that greater processing effort generates the *possibility* of greater reward in the form of more contextual effects: *were* one's efforts to be successful, the rewards *would* be greater. This revision runs the risk of vacuity, however, if 'success' simply *means* 'greater rewards'. We may pursue the reverse situation as well: can there be lots of contextual effects with little cognitive effort? Perhaps such is the effect of puns and jokes—perhaps too of poems. We thus return to the first question, regarding how literary, and in particular poetic, works produce their effects. This will be the concern of the following section.

v. Relevance Theory and Cognitive Effects

It is a fair question why poets should choose to repeat concrete sounds and/or abstract structures when conveying their poetic messages. After all, it would seem that repetition devices tend to slow down the comprehension process and require greater cognitive effort. I think the key to understanding the rationale behind these devices (as Pilkington 2000 has argued) is the communicative principle of relevance. If it is true that speakers seek to make their contributions as relevant as possible, and hearers

¹¹³ Pilkington (2000), 79.

assume the contextual relevance of what they hear, then when something unusual occurs—say, a word or sound is repeated—hearers will assume that optimal relevance is still at work. If those repetitions require more processing effort, on this view hearers should tacitly assume that the effort will be repaid with greater contextual effects. This is precisely what poetic techniques are meant to produce. Without stating anything explicitly, merely by using words that sound alike (for example), a poet may lead us to consider ways in which the concepts signified by those words relate to one another, or novel ways in which to consider the concepts themselves. A lovely example is the following stanza from Ezra Pound's *Mauberland*, discussed in Fussell 1979 (p. 110):

The 'age demanded' chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time.
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the 'sculpture' of rhyme.

Fussell's analysis of these four lines is masterful and exemplifies precisely how form is contributing to content in this case, so I will indulge in a lengthy quotation and only add that 'kinema' above is further contributing to the meaning of 'plaster' as something that is not real and substantial, but merely an image of reality:

Here *plaster* and *alabaster* 'sound alike', all right, just as *time* and *rhyme* do. But when we inquire why they have been disposed so that their sound resemblances will organize the stanza, we perceive that their relationships are not only logical but witty as well. Plaster and alabaster are total opposites as materials for plastic art: plaster is squeezed or molded into some predetermined shape; it often mimics some other material—most often stone—and it is conspicuously fragile and impermanent. Alabaster, on the other hand, must be worked from the outside: it must be incised, and incision implies a sharpness in both the cutting tool and the intelligence that commands it. The shape of a figure cut in alabaster cannot be wholly predetermined, for it will depend in part on the unique texture of the stone. And finally, no one works in alabaster without some aspirations toward permanence.

By rhyming the words which represent these two rich symbols of technical, aesthetic opposition, the stanza appears to compare them while

ironically it actually contrasts them. That is, the sound similarity ‘says’ that they resemble each other, while the rhetoric of the stanza asserts their difference. We are moved in two directions at once, or we are abused only to be disabused: irony is the result. A similar sort of irony results from the rhyming of *time* and *rhyme*—or actually *no loss of time* with ‘*sculpture*’ of *rhyme*. The sound similarity implies a semantic similarity between fast manufacturing and permanent beauty. And again, our perception that the implied comparison is really masking a significant contrast produces our experience of irony. (pp. 110-1)

What Fussell notes regarding a reader’s expectations when words sound alike can be accounted for by Sperber and Wilson’s principle of relevance. If a listener’s expects a speaker’s contribution to be aimed at optimal relevance, then that listener should expect that when words are matched in position and sound, as they are in Pound’s stanza, that this was done for a reason and attention is thereby being called to them. So here I will expand upon Pilkington’s (2000) proposal that relevance theory can explain poetic effects, focusing particularly on the role repetition structures play in aiding our understanding of what poems say, and in promoting affect.

According to Sperber and Wilson, a ‘speaker aiming at optimal relevance will leave implicit everything her hearer can be trusted to supply with less effort than would be needed to process an explicit prompt’ (S&W 218). This occurs frequently in everyday conversation, as when someone says ‘I’m cold’ with the intention not (merely) to inform another of that state, but also to inform that other that she is uncomfortable and to request that the window be shut. Literature in general and poetry in particular exploit this aspect of linguistic communication. Poets take advantage of various poetic devices so as to say more with fewer words. This is one reason why paraphrasing a poem is so problematic, and typically involves considerably more words to express a presumed poetic message than were used in the poem itself. We need only consider Pound’s dense stanza above in contrast with

Fussell's insightful analysis of it. We can say that one of the things left implicit by Pound, and that he expected his readers to bring to the interpretative table, was something like 'compare and contrast words that sound alike and are placed in parallel positions in their respective lines'. In relevance-theoretic terms, we can say that techniques such as this are invitations to readers or listeners to explore the encyclopedic entries of the concepts involved; they are 'ways of encouraging readers to explore memory more thoroughly, to combine memories stored at different conceptual addresses in order to increase the range of cognitive effects'.¹¹⁴

Are such techniques, then, cognitive facilitators or are they hurdles we must jump over on our way to understanding what is being said? The picture above suggests that passages such as Pound's follow the economic spirit of relevance theory, since they convey more with fewer words. But both Pilkington and Sperber and Wilson view the use of such techniques as requiring greater processing effort than passages that do not have them.

Within our framework, the task of the hearer faced with these utterances [where repetition occurs] is to reconcile the fact that a certain expression has been repeated with the assumption that optimal relevance has been aimed at. *Clearly, the extra linguistic processing effort incurred by the repetition must be outweighed by some increase in contextual effects triggered by the repetition itself.* (S&W 220, my emphasis)

There is an assumption in the theory that sentences where repetition occur do require more linguistic processing than sentences where no repetition is used. It is not clear to me that this is always the case. But in light of that possibility we would do well to distinguish between a lexical economy (fewer words used) and a cognitive economy (less processing effort required). Clearly, an economy of words does not entail that

¹¹⁴ Pilkington (2000), 77.

less effort will be required to process them. Indeed, more effort may be required, as in cases where there aren't sufficient contextual assumptions mutually manifest to the participants in a conversation. Still, where sufficient assumptions are mutually manifest, it could be that repetition saves rather than demands more effort on the part of a listener.

Sperber and Wilson consider in particular the technique of epizeuxis, the repetition of words. The use of epizeuxis, they argue, is no guarantee of poetic effects. The effects of epizeuxis, Sperber and Wilson claim, vary from merely expressing propositional content ('Here's a red sock, here's a red sock, here's a blue sock'), to expressing a speaker's attitude toward a given propositional content (say, that of being committed to what it expresses, as in 'I shall never, never smoke again') to *exhibiting* a speaker's attitude, in a *non-propositional* manner, to a given propositional content ('My childhood days are gone, gone'). The difference between the last one and the first two is that the first two could be paraphrased without loss of content ('Here are two red socks and one blue sock' and 'I am truly committed to never smoking again'), whereas the last one could not. Utterances such as 'My childhood days are gone, gone', according to Sperber and Wilson, 'as it were *exhibit* rather than merely *describe* the speaker's mental or emotional state: they give rise to non-propositional effects which would be lost under paraphrase' (S&W 220, my emphasis). Epizeuxis in the last utterance, then, produces a poetic effect, whereas its use in the first two does not. How does it do this? In such cases, 'the repetition should yield an increase in contextual effects by encouraging the hearer to extend the context and thereby add further implicatures':

the repetition in ['My childhood days are gone, gone'] cannot be accounted for by assuming that the speaker's childhood days are longer gone, or more definitely gone, than might otherwise have been assumed, so if the presumption of relevance is to be confirmed, then the repetition of 'gone' must be interpreted as an encouragement to expand the context. ... In other words, the hearer is encouraged to be imaginative and to take a large share of responsibility in imagining what it may be for the speaker to be way past her youth. (S&W 221)

The distinction between logical *implications* and conversation *implicatures* becomes important in this context. Implications are logically derived consequences; implicatures involve what is *suggested*. A hearer may derive equally many logical implications from 'My childhood days are gone' as from 'My childhood days are gone, gone'. What Sperber and Wilson claim is that the second sentence has more *implicatures*; that is, 'more contextual assumptions and implications which receive some degree of backing from the speaker' (id., 222). It is important to note that for Sperber and Wilson such implicatures still involve propositional effects: 'What look like non-propositional effects associated with the expression of attitudes, feelings and states of mind can be approached in terms of the notion of weak implicature' (id., 222). In this manner, it seems that Sperber and Wilson want to reduce all that may be transmitted by a linguistic utterance to cognitive effects. This seems to me to be excessively reductionist, and not phenomenologically accurate. Even if it is true that all affective states involve propositions—something that even a cognitivist about the emotions need not agree to—that is not all there is to them. Perhaps there is no change in an affective state which does not involve a change in a cognitive state, but that does not mean that the affective state just *is* the cognitive one.

Sperber and Wilson contend that poetic effects, which they understand as the 'peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide

array of weak implicatures’, ‘are typically, but wrongly, attributed to syntactic or phonological constructions of the sentences in which they occur’, inasmuch as ‘a repetitive syntactic pattern [in their ex., epizeuxis] does not invariably give rise to noticeable stylistic effects. The same is true of all the figures of style identified by classical rhetoric’ (S&W 222). Rather, they argue, everything reduces to the principle of relevance: when there are syntactic, semantic, and/or phonological parallelisms, these ‘reinforce the hearer’s natural tendency to reduce processing effort by looking for matching parallelisms in propositional form and implicature’ (id.). Again, the claim strikes me a too strong. Does the fact (if it is a fact) that, say, epizeuxis, does not create poetic effects every time it is used entail that poetic effects should never be explained by adverting to them? Can’t weak implicatures be explained solely by the workings of syntactic and phonological structures *sometimes*? It is not clear to me that phenomena in language are an all or nothing affair.

I think this difficulty is connected with the one above, concerning affective states. It seem to me that it is because Sperber and Wilson view poetic effects as at bottom cognitive effects that they cannot accept that syntactic and phonological constructions do, sometimes, promote affective states independently of any propositional content. Consider some of the examples given by Sperber and Wilson:

- (1) ‘Here’s a red sock, here’s a red sock, here’s a blue sock.’
- (2) ‘We went for a long, long, walk.’
- (3) ‘There were houses, houses everywhere.’

According to them, in all three cases, though there is repetition, there is no poetic effect. That is because in all three cases what is said may be paraphrased without loss of content. We have already seen a paraphrase for (1); (2) could be paraphrased as ‘We went for a very long walk’, and (3), they say, as ‘There were a great many

houses'. I think the paraphrases offered for (2) and especially (3) in fact do result in a loss of content, and I think that even (1), in a particular context, could be used to mean more than 'Here are two red socks and here's blue sock'. I will leave (1) aside, however, and focus on (2) and (3). I think that, if we assume the principle of relevance, we should expect a speaker to make the choice of saying 'We went for a long, long, walk' rather than 'We went for a very long walk' for a communicative reason. We can easily imagine a scenario in which one utters that sentence to convey the fact that, during that long walk, the walkers had a serious conversation. With the right emphases, that could perhaps also be conveyed by the alternative paraphrase. But it seems to me that the repetition in the first one does away with the need for expressive emphasis; we can see the repetition as substituting for it. So the repetition in this case is not a meaningless choice, and the sentence is not paraphrasable without loss of content. Moreover, again, it seems that the theory itself should predict such choices to be meaningful.

The same goes for example (3). There is an expressiveness in 'There were houses, houses everywhere' that is absent in 'There were a great many houses'. The paraphrase again falls flat, and would require extra-linguistic contribution in the form of emphases and intonation, to achieve the expressive character of the original. Notice that this character could be of different, even opposing, sorts. We can imagine a child from a rural area excited to see the overabundance of houses in a particular urban area, as we can imagine an adult environmentalist utter those words with regret as he recalls that an area that was previously home to a virgin forest is now occupied by a

large housing development. Switch their sentences to ‘There were a great many houses’ and the contextual effects are considerably altered.

It is also worthy of note that epizeuxis is the only figure that Sperber and Wilson discuss. So it could well be that, even if what they claim for it is true—and I hope to have given enough reasons to cast that into doubt—it could still fail to apply to the many other poetic devices I have discussed in the previous chapter.

I think Sperber and Wilson are right that the use of repetition in language does not flout the principle of relevance but rather its use can be explained by it. And it seems plausible to say that the presence of repetition is no guarantee of poetic effect, although it seems equally plausible that its use is not random and contributes to the production of contextual effects, poetic or otherwise. Nevertheless, the notion of poetic effect with which Sperber and Wilson are working seems unduly cognitive-based. I will now explore that notion further by considering in more detail how relevance theory accounts for our affective responses to linguistic utterances.

vi. Relevance Theory and Affective Responses

As I have noted above, for Sperber and Wilson the affective responses promoted by poetic techniques are reducible to cognitive effects:

How do poetic effects affect the mutual cognitive environment of speaker and hearer? They do not add entirely new assumptions which are strongly manifest in this environment. Instead, they marginally increase the manifestness of a great many weakly manifest assumptions. In other words, poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge. Utterances with poetic effects can be used precisely to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality. What we are suggesting is that, *if you look at these affective effects through the microscope of relevance theory, you see a wide array of minute cognitive effects.* (S&W 224, my emphasis)

It may well be true that affective effects consist, in part, of cognitive effects, and even that some consist entirely of them. However, some affective responses to poetry in particular are engendered by phonological devices that arguably promote responses that are not cognitive. The underlying musical dimension of most poetry, especially formally dense poetry, may be seen as promoting particular moods in the listener or reader, and those moods need not be understood propositionally.

If we recall the nursery rhymes exemplified earlier in this chapter, with their typical three and four beats or stresses per line, and two-rhymes rhyme scheme, we will see that their sing-songy and playful effect frequently occurs irrespective of what is being said. Consider, for instance, this popular English rhyme:

Ring-a-Ring-of-Roses
A pocket full of posies
Atchoo! Atchoo!
We all fall down

This rhyme, sung joyfully by countless English-speaking children, seems incontrovertibly playful, although its words do not, of themselves, seem to make much sense at all. As it turns out, what they refer to is not the sort of thing a parent would encourage a child to sing about, since, literary scholars contend, they refer to the bubonic plague that ravaged Europe in the 14th century.¹¹⁵ In this centuries-old rhyme, the first line refers to the first signs of the disease—red, bruise-like marks—while the ‘pocket full of posies’ refers to a practice commonly followed by doctors as a means to ward off the bad smells believed to be its cause. The sneeze of the third

¹¹⁵ ‘Nursery Rhymes’, posted at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A288966>.

line was a sign that the disease had entered an advanced stage, and not long after one would indeed ‘fall down’ for good.¹¹⁶

Interestingly, it seems to be a typical characteristic of nursery rhymes that they either do not make much sense, at least on the surface, or that they reflect relatively unpleasant subject matter. The Hungarian rhyme cited in section (ii) starts out telling of a colorful, ear-less and tail-less calf, and moves on to a statement that the speaker will live where milk is sold. Nothing seems to matter much beyond the syllable stresses, the alliterations, and the rhymes. The Russian and the Brazilian rhymes are not particularly pleasant, the one being about scaring a child by threatening her with a biting wolf, and the other about a fight between two flowers. Lullabies, of course, are not expected to be understood by their target listeners; they are rather simply expected to work.

Some patterning schemes seem more ‘directly perceptible’ than others, and for that reason their effect seems stronger. Rhymes can be made more or less obvious, and they are more obvious when they come at the end of a line rather than within it. Anaphora, the repetition of words at the beginning of a line, gives a very forceful and indeed somewhat coarse effect, as in many of Whitman’s poems, as contrasted with poems that do not make use of that technique. Some patternings seem considerably less available to conscious perception: Jakobson went so far as to note the symmetrical distribution of adjectival participles in the odd stanzas of one of Baudelaire’s *Spleen* poems¹¹⁷. Naturally, if a patterning is not directly perceptible it

¹¹⁶ The alternative third line, ‘Ashes! Ashes!’ is presumed to refer to the burning of plagued bodies; that theory, however, founders on the historical fact that diseased bodies were buried in mass graves and not burned. See footnote above for source.

¹¹⁷ Pilkington (2000), 17, discussed in Culler (1975).

becomes extremely difficult to assess what effects it might have on the reader or listener.

There may be a worry, moreover, that a given pattern should, in principle, produce the same effects regardless of its instantiation, and an account that worked on such an assumption would provide ‘a greatly impoverished’ view of aesthetic effects.¹¹⁸ But this is an unfounded worry. First, there is some justification, beyond the nursery rhyme scenario just discussed, to think that certain patterns *do* typically produce certain aesthetic effects, and effects that are below the cognitive threshold. Many closed verse forms have become associated with certain types of subject-matter—imagine an elegy written in limerick form—and it is perhaps more sensible to hypothesize that such long-lived associations are not random than to expect that they are. Secondly, although there may be a form-association at a broad, general level (say, amusement with the limerick), each poem fills a pre-established pattern with a distinct set of words. So there is an inescapable particularity, which will relate to particular effects of each poem, despite the commonality of form. To succumb to such worries is tantamount to fearing that all of Shakespeare’s sonnets should have the same effects, since they’re all written in sonnet form. We can at best expect that, in general, sonnets will be more serious, whereas limericks will be more light-hearted. The association is not so much of form to topic but of form to a general mood or tone. Poems that in subject-matter go against the tone promoted by the form typically produce an effect of irony. That they produce such an effect is, I think, some evidence that the association has some basis. I will return to this in my concluding remarks.

¹¹⁸ Pilkington (2000), 18.

A final note on relevance theory. It is perhaps ironic that Sperber and Wilson's theory, which sheds a needed light on some fundamental workings of poetic form, also explains why poetry tends to be less popular than novels, even though novels are as a rule considerably longer than poems and so (in principle) take up a lot more time from a reader's day. Relevance theory would predict that readers should find that poems do not satisfy the optimal balance of cognitive effect to processing effort. In other words, there may be a presumption on the part of the average reader that poems are generally not worth the effort. Naturally, this presumption is precisely what poetry lovers challenge. And yet both parties may agree that poetry, like most art worthy of the name, is often difficult.

vii. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show two things. The first was that we have a natural functional attunement to repeated sound structures, particularly at the concrete level (e.g., rhyme and alliteration), but also at the abstract one (e.g., meter). Such attunement was seen to be functional in the early stages of language learning in that it promotes the development of phonological awareness; that awareness in turn is correlated with the development of literacy. This attunement was also seen to be functional and to arise naturally in the largely oral culture of the *trovadores* of Northeastern Brazil, who, without any formal instruction, pattern language in highly intricate ways in the performance, often impromptu, of their poems. The *trovadores* in particular open a contemporary window onto the likely world of the earliest poets, but both groups provide some empirical support for the idea that an art form that

relied on language and emerged in an oral culture would naturally involve recurrence patterning so as to convey messages in a memorable and economic fashion.

The second goal of this chapter was to show that this fashion is indeed economic, and for that I enlisted the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson. Retaining their insight that interlocutors communicate on the assumption that what is being said is relevant within the communicative context, I further develop their idea to include the relevance of *how* things are being said, which accounts for poets creating a pattern for a pragmatic, communicative reason, and for their readers or listeners assuming the contextual relevance of the patterns presented and so seeking out contextual effects on the basis of them. This, I argued, involves accessing their encyclopedic entries for the concepts presented, and results (or at least is assumed to be intended to result) in an expansion or a reevaluation of those entries. Contra Sperber and Wilson, I also argued that syntactic and phonological constructions may also make a contribution both to what is being said and to the communication or promotion of an affective state. I defended in addition an expansion of their model beyond the purely cognitive, on the grounds that, although affective states may involve beliefs, propositions and implicatures, that is not all there is to them, and some moods may be promoted by an underlying linguistic rhythm without having any propositions or implicatures associated with them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Further Avenues of Inquiry

For reasons having to do with both the ubiquity of repetition techniques such as meter, alliteration, and rhyme in poetic traditions around the globe, and with the trend to transform and reject many of those techniques begun at the turn of the twentieth century, I have proposed that the only defensible definition of poetry must now be an intentional-historical formalist one. If my definition is right, then it is clear that poems and (e.g) novels belong in different categories, rather than differing merely by degree. For the tradition of the novel is not at all marked by a concern with repetition techniques of the sorts that have marked the history of poetry, and so an intention to create a novel is not one where a concern with those techniques will be of definitional or evaluative significance. In other words, a novel will not be one because a writer intends to use repetition schemes or intends to avoid them, and a reader or literary critic will not find anything unusual in a novel that is not written in, say, iambic pentameter. But the opposite is not true, and this is significant: a reader or literary critic will find it indeed unusual if a novel is written in iambic pentameter, and rightly so, because that is not a feature associated with the novel.

There are a few philosophical issues that I think may be illuminated if we take a closer look at poetry as a distinct type of verbal art. I will here discuss three of them, namely: (i) the intentionalism debate; (ii) the nature of aesthetic properties; and (iii) the critical evaluation of poems. Although I could not explore these topics fully here, I hope to pursue them in future work.

The first issue concerns the role of an author's intentions in the interpretation of an literary work. From the initial debate between E.D. Hirsch and Monroe

Beardsley, who defended actual intentionalism and anti-intentionalism respectively, to contemporary views such as Jerrold Levinson's hypothetical intentionalism and Noël Carroll's conversationalism, the actual intentions of an author have been deemed determinative of meaning (intentionalism), irrelevant to it (anti-intentionalism), hypothesized to on the basis of the evidence available to an ideal reader (hypothetical intentionalism), and arrived at in a manner analogous to that in which we infer the intentions of our interlocutors (conversationalism). Interestingly, Hirsch and Beardsley both appealed to examples from poetry in their works, while in the contemporary debate philosophers typically take their examples from prose literature. In both cases, authorial intentions are presumed to play the same role in the writing of novels, short stories, essays, and poems, so that whatever answer one gives to the intentionalism question, it should be applicable across the board.

My question is: could it perhaps be the case that our intentions are differently realized in different kinds of art forms and, perhaps consequently, differently construed from the perspective of an appreciator? Consider a difference between painting and photography. Typically in the case of painting, most everything that we see on the canvas is there because a painter intended it to be there, and in just such a way: yellow here, red there, here the eyes, there the cypress tree, and in just this thickness of paint, with just this perspective (again, this is the typical scenario; we need only think of painters such as Pollock. We may say that in the case of paintings, intentions are 'richly realizable'. Now compare the case of photography. There may of course be a good deal of control on the part of the photographer as to what makes it onto the photographic film (or the digital image): the angle, the light, the focus, the

distribution of the elements photographed, and however many other variables are under the photographer's powers to manipulate. However, there seem to be several variables that are *not* under a photographer's control, depending on the object being photographed. If it is a landscape photo, natural light is not under her control; she is rather at its mercy. If it is a person, facial expressions are not entirely under her control and arguably even under her subject's (say, if he's tired or upset with his girlfriend he may have a hard time looking cheerful, no matter how skillful the photographer's directorial efforts). Moreover, no matter how attentive, something may enter a photographer's frame without her noticing it—flies have a way of showing up unannounced.

The general problem to which these variables point in the case of photography is that photographic objects exist apart from and before the event of being photographed. Inasmuch as they may interfere with a photographer's intentions, we may characterize photographic intentions as relatively 'poorly realizable'. (Indeed, the fact that objects exist prior to their being photographed or filmed was used in the early theoretical discussions of these media to argue against the possibility of creating artworks with them: they reproduce rather than create, and thus leave no room for artistic expression.¹¹⁹) Now, if this is a real difference in the degree of realization of artistic intentions, should this difference not be reflected in the role we accord those intentions in the interpretation of paintings and photographs respectively? Perhaps we cannot have a 'one size fits all' answer to how we should go about our interpretation of artworks.

¹¹⁹ For a contemporary discussion of these views, see Scruton (1983) and Lopes (2003).

Does an analogous situation emerge in literature? Consider the difference in particular between lyric poetry (that is, excluding the epic or drama) and fictional works such as novels. Most poetry is, in fact, lyric, non-narrative poetry—and this has been true from the beginnings of poetic literature. Lyric poetry is typically devoid of characters with whom we could empathize and of a narrative that would structure the events of their fictional lives. Rather, in the lyric, what we find is a poetic persona, projected in one way or another by the poet. But this persona is not the same as a fictional character. For one, it is typically not placed in a context, given a background from which we may judge its actions, understand its plight, appreciate its joys. Its being written in the first person is indeed one of the defining characteristics of the lyric. Novels, on the other hand, are the domain of characters whose ups and downs concern and move us, whose motivations puzzle and intrigue us, and, even when they are on the whole framed from a first person perspective, typically move in and out of a third-person descriptive mode. Also importantly, novels are not generally written in verse.

What I would like to suggest is that we might need different interpretative models to handle lyric poems and novels. It may, for instance, make more sense to adopt either an actual intentionalist or a conversationalist perspective with lyric poems, in virtue of their being written in the first-person. While we cannot and should not always identify the author with the poetic persona, in cases such as those of confessional poetry (think of Sylvia Plath), such an identification seems not only unavoidable but perhaps also expected. The connection between the reader or listener and the poet seems to be more direct and unmediated—almost like a conversation. If

what we have in such cases follows indeed a conversational model, and if in actual conversations we are ‘actual’ intentionalists, perhaps the appropriate model of interpretation for lyric poetry is an intentionalist one. In the case of novels and storytelling in general, what an author wishes to say is mediated by the actions of her characters, the narrative plot, the descriptions of things and places. It is perhaps more appropriate to adopt a hypothetical intentionalist, or perhaps even an anti-intentionalist, stance in such cases, and construe an interpretation of the work on the basis of textual and extra-textual evidence without an eye to ascertaining the intentions of a specific speaker.

Another important issue in aesthetics is that of aesthetic properties and how they depend, or do not, on lower-level perceptual properties. For example, is a painting made entirely in primary colors—red, yellow, and blue—necessarily vibrant and lively? In a classic article, Frank Sibley (1955) answered that question with a resounding ‘no’:

Whatever kind of dependence this is, and there are various relationships between aesthetic qualities and non-aesthetic features, what I want to make clear in this paper is that there are no non-aesthetic features which serve in *any* circumstances as logically *sufficient conditions* for applying aesthetic terms. Aesthetic or taste concepts are not in *this* respect condition-governed at all.¹²⁰

So, for Sibley, we are never warranted in inferring an aesthetic property on the basis of descriptions of purely perceptual properties—we must see the work and exercise our faculty of taste to ascertain what aesthetic qualities a work has. At best, Sibley says, we may infer what aesthetic properties a work does *not* have from a description of its non-aesthetic features. If a friend tells us of a painting consisting entirely of a

¹²⁰ Sibley, ‘Aesthetic Concepts’ (1955) In Lamarque and Olsen (2003), p. 128, (his emphases).

pale blue rectangle, for instance, we may correctly infer that it is neither bold nor fiery. While aesthetic properties are not positively condition-governed, they may be negatively condition-governed.

Many reams of paper have been spent on Sibley's thesis. It is not difficult, upon reading Sibley's paper, to find oneself with a nagging intuition that some counterexample must exist and that aesthetic properties must be, sometimes, positively condition-governed. It is widely agreed that some relationship exists between perceptual and aesthetic properties. The difficulty is in ascertaining the nature of that relationship. Must a change in aesthetic properties always involve a change in lower-level perceptual properties? Various kinds of supervenience theses have been proposed to explain this relationship. I will not delve into that here. I will simply point to a few examples that I think may call Sibley's theory into doubt. Consider, for instance, the limerick. It follows a particular poetic form, and if you have forgotten you can ask your mother:

A: What is a limerick, Mother?
A: It's a form of verse, said brother
B: In which lines one and two
B: Rhyme with five when it's through
A: And three and four rhyme with each other.

Now here are two somewhat similar limericks:

There was a young woman named Bright
Whose speed was faster than light:
She set out one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.

There was a young man named Bright
Who got into a very bad fight:
They stabbed him with a knife
And raped his wife

And killed him with all their might.

I think we can say without controversy that the first one is light and funny. ‘Light’ and ‘funny’ are aesthetic properties. Are they dependent entirely on the content of the limerick, or is there something about that sound structure, with its short lines of two and three beats, its three end-rhymes, and the two shorter lines in between that contribute to its light humor? What is our reaction when we listen to the second, alternative limerick? Do we find ourselves wanting to smile or chuckle and then check ourselves upon registering the meaning of the words? My question is: can we have unfunny limericks? Why are certain poetic forms generally thought appropriate to certain subjects—is it a matter of convention that the limerick is for light fun and mockery, or is there something in that metrical and rhyming scheme that affects our ‘auditory imagination’ in a manner that defies seriousness? At least on the surface level, there is much in poetry that is indeed a matter of convention. But even where convention is the overt reason a form is chosen for a subject-matter, we may inquire how that convention came to be. Can it be a matter of convention alone that most nursery rhymes and children’s poetry, for example, are written in three- or four-stressed lines, in couplets or four-line stanzas rhyming abab? Such a structure, as I have noted, tends to create a light sing-song effect. But now consider this iambic trimeter quatrain by Emily Dickinson:

I like a look of agony,
Because I know it’s true;
Men do not sham convulsion,
Nor simulate a throe.¹²¹

¹²¹ Emily Dickinson, *Collected Poems*, (‘Time and Eternity’ section, No. XII, p. 186).

The subject is hardly a light one, and yet the form goes right against it, thereby creating an effect perhaps of sarcasm. Despite its subject-matter, I think it is easy to imagine children singing and clapping to these lines without a thought to their meaning and having a ball.

We do not need to confine ourselves to form alone to argue, against Sibley, that sometimes aesthetic properties are positively condition-governed. For the subject-matter of a poem may also be described in non-aesthetic terms. And if it may so be described, then that plus a description of its poetic form may well be sufficient to warrant an aesthetic ascription.

Finally, attending to poetry as a literary form with distinctive features—namely, the treatment of certain kinds of repetition devices—has consequences for how we evaluate poems. If we attend to poems not as poems but as works of literature in general, I think that much will be left out in our assessment of their aesthetic properties and aesthetic value. At any rate, it is hard to think what it would be like to attend to a work as a piece of literature *in general* rather than as a novel, short story, essay, lyric poem. Perhaps it is possible to attend to and evaluate a work simply insofar as it is a literary work. But that attention and that evaluation will leave out much that is of central value. Once we know that a given kind of verbal art is what it is in virtue of certain properties—for example, that it is intended to belong in a tradition wherein metrical variations are means of poetic expression—then we have a criterion to help us judge how it responds to that tradition.

Contemporary philosophers of music have argued for the need for different ontologies of classical, jazz, rock, and other types of music. When it comes to the

notion of aesthetic experience, one need not be a philosopher to know that the experiences of these types of music varies greatly. So it does not seem to be an aberration to say that we can have, in some sense, a philosophy of rock, a philosophy of jazz, a philosophy of classical/instrumental/absolute music. This need not do away with a philosophy of music that investigates the elements of commonality among the musical arts, just as there may still be a philosophy of art in general. I think the same is the case with poetry and literature. I think there is still good reason to investigate and analyze literature *qua* literature, in all its forms. But I hope to have shown that, in some sense, a philosophy of poetry would be a fruitful addition to contemporary analytic aesthetics.

Appendix: Glossary Of Poetic Terms¹²²

Accentual meter. Meter whose marker (q.v.) is syllable accent or stress.

Accentual-syllabic meter. Also called ‘syllable-stress’ or syllabo-tonic verse, accentual-syllabic meter counts both stresses and syllables, and in *iambic* (two-syllable foot with the second syllable accented) *pentameter* (five times the foot, so ten syllables given that the iamb is a two-syllable foot).

Aeolic verseforms. [Sappho, Alcaeus] “The name usually given to a class of ancient Greek lyric meters, so called because first attested in the poems of Sappho and Alcaeus, which were composed in the aeolic dialect” (PEPP, 9).

Alliteration. “The repetition of the sound of an initial consonant or consonant cluster in stressed syllables close enough to each other for the ear to be affected” (AHD1, 36).

Anadiplosis. “Rhetorical repetition at the beginning of a phrase of the word or words with which the previous phrase ended” (AHD2, 64).

Anaphora. “The repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or lines. Conversely, *epistrophe* (q.v.) (also called *epiphora*, e.g. Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice* 3.3.4.) repeats words at the ends of clauses, lines, or stanzas; so Tennyson repeats ‘the days that are no more’ at the end of each stanza of ‘Tears, Idle Tears.’ Synonyms for *epistrophe* are *epiphora* and *antistrophe*” (PEPP, 73).

Anceps. “Any position in the metrical pattern which permits either a long or a short syllable. This is simply to say that some positions in the meter are not important to perception of the pattern, hence are not regulated strictly . . . it is not the *syllable* which is anceps but the *position* in the metrical pattern it fills” (PEPP, 73-74).

Assonance. Correspondence or resemblance of repeated vowel sounds (AHD1, 42).

Cadence. A progression of chords moving to a harmonic close (AHD1, 97).

¹²² Unless otherwise noted, all entries are quoted or adapted from *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (New York: MJF Books, 1993) referred to as (PEPP), *The American Heritage Dictionary*, based on the 2nd College Ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983) referred to as (AHD1), and *The American Heritage Dictionary*, based on the 4th Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., c2000) referred to as (AHD2). Page numbers to the *Princeton Encyclopedia* and both *American Heritage Dictionaries* are given in parenthesis at the end of each entry. The glossary is only meant to provide a basic explanation of these terms; the reader is encouraged to consult the *Encyclopedia* and/or the *Dictionaries* for further information.

Caesura. “A pause in a line of verse dictated by sense or natural speech rhythm rather than by metrics” (AHD2, 260).

Chant. “A short, simple series of syllables or words that are sung on or intoned to the same note or a limited range of notes” (AHD2, 310).

Colon (pl. cola). “A section of metrical period in quantitative verse, consisting of two to six feet and in Latin verse having one principal accent” (AHD2, 364).

Consonance. “A repetition of terminal consonant sounds of words, as in *rain & tone*” (AHD1, 150).

Couplet. “A unit of verse consisting of two successive lines, usually rhyming and having the same meter and often forming a complete thought or syntactic unit” (AHD2, 419).

Dactyl. “A metrical foot consisting of one accented syllable followed by two unaccented or of one long syllable followed by two short, as in *flattery*” (AHD2, 456).

Dirge. “A mournful or elegiac poem or other literary work, or a slow, mournful musical composition” (AHD2, 512).

Dramatic poetry. “Western critics have interpreted the phrase dramatic poetry in three main ways: (1) lyrics or short poems that imply a scene; (2) plays that are valorized with the adjective ‘poetic’; and (3) dramas whose dialogue is calculatingly rhymed—in rhythms that are often regularized into meters and that are usually presented as discreet lines on the page” (PEPP, 304).

Elegy. (From Gk. *elegeia*, ‘lament’) In its modern sense, a short poem occasioned by the death of a person which typically includes a movement from expressed sorrow to consolation. See ‘elegiac’. (PEPP, 322).

Elegiac. The elegiac distich (see ‘stich’) is a Classical Greek couplet consisting of a hexameter followed by a pentameter. It came to be associated with the topic of mourning or loss (hence ‘elegy’, q.v.), although originally it treated of a variety of subjects. The elegiac stanza is an iambic pentameter quatrain rhymed *abab*. (PEPP, 321).

Encomium. “Strictly, a Greek choral lyric performed ‘in the revel’ (*kōmos*) to celebrate a person’s achievement. More generally, the name is applied to any poem praising a man rather than a god.” (PEPP, 332).

Enjambment. “The continuation of a syntactic unit from one line or couplet of a poem to the next with no pause” (AHD2, 593).

Epanalepsis. “In Classical rhetoric, a figure most often defined as the repetition of a word or words after intervening words, either (a) for emphasis . . . or (b) for clarity, as to resume a construction after a lengthy parenthesis” (PEPP, 361).

Epic. “An epic is a long narrative poem that treats a single heroic figure or a group of such figures and concerns an historical event, such as a war or conquest, or an heroic quest or some other significant mythic or legendary achievement that is central to the traditions and belief of its culture” (PEPP, 361). “Epic incorporates within it not only the methods of narrative poetry, but also of lyric and dramatic poetry. It includes and expands upon panegyric and lament. With its extended speeches and well-crafted scenic structure, it is often dramatic and it perhaps with the choral ode the true ancestor of ancient drama” (362). But note that while it may often be dramatic, it is not drama, insofar as it is not written for stage performance (although the storyteller might have ‘performed’ such parts), and while it may have lyric passages, it is not construed as a lyric poem—music, e.g., is incidental rather than essential to what is written.

Epistrophe. See *anaphora*.

Epithalamium. “A lyric ode in honor of a bride and bridegroom” (AHD2, 601).

Epizeuxis. See *ploce*.

Foot. “A unit of poetic meter consisting of stressed and unstressed syllables in any of various set combinations. For example, an iambic foot has an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable” (AHD2, 684-685).

Form. “Method of arrangement or manner of coordinating elements in literary or musical composition or in organized discourse” (AHD2, 690).

Haiku. “A Japanese lyric verse form having three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables, traditionally involving an aspect of nature or the seasons” (AHD2, 789).

Iamb. “A metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable or a short syllable followed by a long syllable, as in *delay*” (AHD2, 867).

Ictus. “The accent that falls on a stressed syllable in a line of scanned verse” (AHD2, 870); ‘the most neutral term for each marked or prominent position’ in a line of verse (PEPP, 554). Also called ‘marker’ (q.v.).

Limerick. “A light humorous, nonsensical, or bawdy verse of five anapestic lines usually with the rhyme scheme *aabba*” (AHD2, 1015).

Lyric. “Of or relating to a category of poetry that expresses subjective thoughts and feelings, often in a songlike style or form” (AHD2, 1045).

Marker. The general term for what is marked in a particular meter or foot: the marker of accentual verse is stress, of quantitative verse, length. Also called ‘ictus’ (q.v.).

Metaphor. “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in ‘*a sea of troubles*’ or ‘*All the world’s a stage*’ (Shakespeare)” (AHD2, 1104).

Meter. Meters can be accentual, syllabic, or quantitative (q.q.v.). “The measured arrangement of words in poetry, as by accentual rhythm, syllabic quantity, or the number of syllables in a line” (AHD2, 1105).

Metonymy. “A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of *Washington* for *the United States government* or of the *sword* for *military power*” (AHD2, 1106).

Metrical (Gk. *metrikoi*). Metrics theorists, ‘who held that only long and short syllables need be considered in scansion (q.v.), and that a long syllable was always twice the length of a short; actual variations were ignored’; these included Aristotle, the Latin grammarians, Bede, Sidney, Mitford, Shipper, Mayor, Wimsatt and Wright. The opposing school of metrical theorists is known as *rhythmici* (q.v.). (PEPP, 787).

Octave. In poetry, “a poem or stanza containing eight lines” (AHD2, 1217).

Ode. “A lyric poem of some length, usually of a serious or meditative nature and having an elevated style and formal stanzaic structure” (AHD2, 1218).

Paean. “A song of joyful praise or exultation” (AHD2, 1262).

Panegyric. “A formal eulogistic composition intended as a public compliment” (AHD2, 1269).

Pattern poetry. “Known also as ‘shaped poetry’ (Gr. *technopaigneia*, Lat. *carmina figurata*), is premodern verse in which the letters, words, or lines are arrayed visually to form recognizable shapes, usually the shapes of natural objects” (PEPP, 890).

Ploce. “The genus of figures for word repetition, with or without intervening words, generally in close proximity, i.e. within the clause or line. Classical and Renaissance rhetoricians distinguished between ploce, as the ‘speedy iteration of one word but with some little intermission by inserting one or two words between’ (Puttenham) and *epizeuxis* (q.v.), repetition with no words intervening . . . Other more complex rhetorical figures which deploy word repetition in syntax—i.e. at the beginnings and endings of phrases and clauses—and in meter as well—i.e. to begin or end lines or stanzas, or at caesurae—are *anaphora* (word-repetition at beginnings), *epistrophe* (at

ends), *symploce* (combination of the two preceding, i.e. one word repeated at beginnings, another at ends—see *anaphora*) (q.q.v.)” (PEPP, 916).

Prosody. “Prosody, broadly defined, is the study of how languages organize sound and the ways in which sound interacts with meaning. It is an ancient field that began with the study of poetry, but in the last several hundred years has expanded to include many other areas of study as well, such as linguistics, phonetics, artificial intelligence and anthropology” (*Versification*, <http://oregonstate.edu/versif/about/index.html>).

“ . . . Prosody is concerned with the study of rhythm and sound effects as they occur in verse and with the various descriptive, historical, and theoretical approaches to the study of these structures” (“prosody” *Britannica Online*, 10 August, 2004)

“Prosody is that branch of poetics which treats what Aristotle called the material and formal causes of art, i.e. its medium and the forms into which that medium can be shaped . . . Prosody is thus the study of the means by which verbal material is made over into verbal art in texts set in verseform, and more particularly the study of those extensions, compressions, and intensifications of meaning of which bound speech becomes capable by increase in formal structure” (PEPP, 982-983).

Prothalamium. “A song in celebration of a wedding” (AHD2, 1409).

Quantitative meter. Meter whose marker is syllable length.

Quatrain. “A stanza or poem of four lines” (AHD2, 1434).

Rhyme. “Correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse” (AHD2, 1496).

Masculine and Feminine Rhyme. “A masculine rhyme joins two oxytonic words (i.e. words whose final syllables are stressed), a feminine rhyme, two paroxytonic words (penultimate syllables stressed, final syllables unstressed). The terms first appear in troubadour poetry of the 14th century” (PEPP, 737).

Rhythm. “The pattern or flow of sound created by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in accentual verse or of long and short syllables in quantitative verse” (AHD2, 1496).

Rhythmicists (Gk. *rhythmikoi*). Musical theorists who hold a musical-rhythmical view of poetry, finding meter too simple an analysis of scansion. These include Aristoxenus of Tarentum (a pupil of Aristotle), Augustine (v. *De Musica*), Joshua Steele, Sidney Lanier, Andreas Heusler, John C. Pope, as well as those who deny that modern poetry is metrical at all, such as G.F. Nott and J.G. Southworth. Their opponents are known as *metrists* (q.v.). (PEPP, 787).

Scansion. “Analysis of verse into metrical patterns” (AHD2, 1555).

Sestet. “A group of six lines of poetry, especially the last six lines of a Petrarchan sonnet” (AHD2, 1592).

Sestina. “A verse form that was first used by the Provençal troubadours, consisting of six six-line stanzas and a three-line envoy. The end words of the first stanza are repeated in varied order as end words in the other stanzas, and they also recur in the envoy” (AHD2, 1592).

Simile. “A figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, often in a phrase introduced by *like* or *as*, as in ‘*How like the winter hath my absence been*’ or ‘*So are you to my thoughts as food to life*’ (Shakespeare)” (AHD2, 1622).

Simploce. See *ploce*.

Sonnet. “A fourteen line verse form usually having one of several conventional rhyme schemes” (AHD2, 1657).

Spondee. “A metrical foot consisting of two long or stressed syllables” (AHD2, 1679).

Stanza. “One of the divisions of a poem, composed of two or more lines usually characterized by a common pattern of meter, rhyme and number of lines” (AHD2, 1692).

Stichic verse. Narrative verse written in a continuous run of lines of equal length. (From Greek, *stichos*, line, so that a couplet is called a ‘distich’, though stich is no longer used to mean ‘line’ in verse theory.) Contrasted with **stanzaic verse**, where stanza breaks break the continuous flow into quatrains or tercets, for example (q.q.v.). (PEPP, 1214).

Syllabic meter. A meter that relies on the counting of syllables.

Tercet. “A group of three lines of verse, often rhyming together or with another triplet” (AHD2, 1784).

Trochee. “A metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, as in *season*, or of a long syllable followed by a short syllable” (AHD2, 1847).

Versification. “Versification has traditionally been considered the art or craft of writing verse, as distinguished from prosody (q.v.), the branch of poetics devoted to the theory and analysis of the structures of verse” (PEPP, 1353).

Villanelle. “A nineteen line poem of fixed form consisting of five tercets and a final quatrain on two rhymes, with the first and third lines of the first tercet repeated

alternately as a refrain closing the succeeding stanzas and joined as the final couplet of the quatrain” (AHD2, 1919).

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